

KITSAP

March 2026

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Executive Director of Kitsap Transit

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Recently harvested greens and vegetables await packing, reflecting Kitsap Fresh's commitment to delivering peak-season freshness to customers across the county.



Photo Courtesy of Kitsap Fresh

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Cover photography: Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

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## Rooted in Community

How Kitsap Community Food Co-op Is Growing a Sustainable Local Food Economy

The member-owned Kitsap Community Food Co-op is strengthening Bremerton's local food economy through shared ownership, local sourcing and affordability programs. More than a grocery store, the co-op keeps food dollars – and decision-making – close to home.

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# When criticism replaces contribution

For ward •  
THINKING



**T**here was a time when if you had strong opinions about your community, you were expected to show up. You attended the meeting. You volunteered. You ran for office. You put your name on something.

Opinion came with ownership.

Today, it often comes with distance.

We live in an era where criticism is constant and participation is optional. It takes seconds to post frustration. It takes hours to attend a public meeting. It takes courage to serve. It takes none to comment.

That imbalance is changing our communities.

Let's be clear: scrutiny is necessary. Public officials should be questioned. Decisions should be debated. Transparency should be demanded.

But accountability is not the same thing as perpetual condemnation.

When criticism replaces contribution, something weakens.

It is easy to question a school board vote if you have never studied the budget constraints behind it. It is easy to accuse a city council of incompetence if you have never had to weigh legal advice, financial limits and public pressure at the same time. It is easy to label decisions as foolish when you do not bear responsibility for the consequences.

Responsibility changes the tone.

When you are the one accountable, decisions are not theoretical. They carry risk. They carry tradeoffs. They carry consequences that extend beyond a comment section.

And that is exactly why fewer people are willing to step forward.

Public service has become an arena of constant criticism. Good people watch what happens to those who serve. The personal attacks, the assumptions of bad intent,

the social media pile-ons, and they quietly decide it is not worth the cost.

So the pool shrinks.

The same small group carries the weight while a larger group critiques from the sidelines.

That is not sustainable.

Communities do not deteriorate because of disagreement. They deteriorate when the ratio of commentators to contributors grows too wide.

If you care deeply about your town, that care should eventually cost you something: time, energy, effort, involvement.

Showing up matters.

Offering solutions matters.

Volunteering matters.

Running for office matters.

Serving on a board matters.

It is not enough to be right from a distance.

A healthy community needs critics who are also participants. It needs people willing

to step into the arena, not just analyze it from the bleachers.

Before adding another public complaint, it is worth asking:

Have I attended the meeting?

Have I spoken during public comment?

Have I volunteered?

Have I offered a solution?

Am I willing to serve?

If the answer is consistently no, then the loudest voice in the room may not be the most invested one.

This is not a call for silence. It is a call for ownership.

Strong communities are not built by spectators.

They are built by people willing to contribute. Even when it is inconvenient, even when it is difficult, even when it invites criticism.

Especially then. ■

**Terry Ward**  
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## KITSAP BUSINESS

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9 Locations to Serve You in Kitsap

From produce and pantry staples to flowers and specialty items, Kitsap Fresh offers a wide array of locally grown and crafted products in one aggregated order.

# Inside Kitsap Fresh

## Growing a Local Food Future

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

On a weekday afternoon in Kitsap County, while most people are still thinking about what to make for dinner, the warehouse at Kitsap Fresh is already humming. Coolers are stocked with local eggs, greens, meat, bread, soups and citrus. Farmers have dropped off carefully labeled boxes. Staff and volunteers sort, weigh and pack orders that will fan out across the county within hours.

It's not the familiar scene of a farmers market – no pop-up tents or bustling crowds – but that's by design. Kitsap Fresh, an online farmers market and food hub, is quietly reshaping how local food moves from field to plate, offering a year-round alternative that prioritizes access, efficiency and sustainability.

"Kitsap Fresh is an online farmers market food hub," said Mary McKeirnan, who manages the warehouse and logistics. "It was started in 2015. It's trying to get local food out to people – any fresh local food – and market source-identified, locally grown food."

Today, Kitsap Fresh connects dozens of small farms and producers to customers across Kitsap County, creating a system that works not just on weekends, but every week of the year.

### How the System Works

The Kitsap Fresh cycle begins each weekend.

"There's an online platform and producers post their products during the week," explained Renee Ziemann, co-president of the Kitsap Fresh board and a Kitsap farmer herself. "The marketplace opens Saturday at nine, so everything ideally is posted before that, but you can add any time during the weekend."

Producers list what they expect to have available the following week, and customers place orders between Saturday morning and Sunday at midnight.

"The nice thing is, farmers and producers can list more as things sell out," Ziemann said. "If something sells out and then we



Mary of Field Point Farm displays fresh eggs that are distributed through Kitsap Fresh's online marketplace, connecting small farms directly to local households.

harvest and think, 'Oh, we probably could push it more,' we'll add more."

Once ordering closes, the logistics begin.

"On Tuesdays, we pack all of the super perishable items that will go into our coolers – frozen and refrigerated items," McKeirnan said. "Those get all received on Tuesdays, and we sort and pack all of those and get them ready to put into coolers Wednesday right before they go out."

Wednesdays are devoted to produce.

Photos Courtesy of Kitsap Fresh

Some items arrive already packed from farms; others are weighed and portioned at the warehouse before being assembled into individual orders for each pickup location.

Customers retrieve their orders at designated drop sites around the county on Wednesday afternoons. Thursdays are reserved for home delivery.

"On Thursday, we have home delivery," McKeirnan said. "The vans go out at 10 a.m. and deliver all day."

For many customers – busy families, people with mobility challenges, or residents far from traditional markets – those midweek pickups and deliveries make local food accessible in ways that farmers markets alone cannot.

## Why Kitsap Fresh Was Needed

Kitsap Fresh emerged in response to gaps in the local food system.

Ziemann, who was launching her own farm around the same time, understands the need clearly.

"There wasn't a lot of midweek sales opportunities for farmers," she said. "That's still pretty true. You can have a CSA midweek, you can sell to cafés midweek. There's not a super strong farmers market midweek."

Kitsap Fresh filled that space by creating a centralized system that works regardless of weather, schedules or geography.

"We do the farmers market – we sell at Poulsbo Farmers Market, and we love farmers markets," Ziemann said. "But I think the cool thing about Kitsap Fresh is it connects us to customers who aren't able to come to markets."

Those barriers can include transportation, mobility, work schedules or childcare.

"There's any number of reasons people couldn't make it to a market but might still be interested in local food," she said.



*Inside the Kitsap Fresh warehouse, orders are organized by drop site and delivery route in preparation for Wednesday pickups and Thursday home deliveries.*



## A Three-Part Mission

Kitsap Fresh's mission is intentionally layered.

"We have a mission to our member producers – to be a marketplace that supports all sorts of producers in Kitsap County, with an eye towards the new and non-traditional farmers," Ziemann said. "Our other piece of the mission is connecting customers to local food. The third piece is building a relocalized food system."

Rather than competing with other local food organizations, Kitsap Fresh sees itself as one piece of a broader ecosystem.

"I think farmers markets are a piece of that. The Co-op is a piece of that," Ziemann said. "But the more sales platforms available for local food, the better."

That interconnected thinking extends beyond county lines, particularly during the winter months.

"I think it matters to get food from Washington, even if it's not from Kitsap in January, versus buying it from California," Ziemann said.

## Supporting Non-Traditional Farmers

A core part of Kitsap Fresh's work is supporting "non-traditional" farmers – those who may be newer to agriculture, farming part-time, or operating outside conventional models.

"We're really interested in supporting women-owned businesses, or young farmers," Ziemann said. "Most farmers are sort of aging out of farming."

Land access is a growing challenge in Kitsap County, where agricultural zoning is limited and property values are high. Kitsap Fresh helps level the playing field by presenting products equally online.

"Something I appreciated when I was a smaller farm was that my product shows up in Kitsap Fresh and it looks just like everybody else's product," Ziemann said. "It's a picture with a price and a description."

That parity matters, especially for farmers juggling multiple jobs or just beginning. "Kitsap Fresh is really flexible in terms of timing," she said.

McKeirnan also sees innovation reflected in how food is grown.

"You have farms like Kitsap Farms – they do aquaponic farming," she said. "Spring Rain, they grow citrus. There are just some really exciting things happening around

*A small staff supported by dedicated volunteers sorts, weighs and packs orders each week, powering the cooperative behind Kitsap Fresh.*



## Feature

the county that we get to help out and tell people about.”

### Reducing Waste, Strengthening Resilience

Sustainability at Kitsap Fresh is as much about systems as it is about soil.

“As a farmer, one option is to go all in as a CSA farm, or all in trying to sell to restaurants, or all in on a farmers market,” Ziemann said. “I found that it’s best to have a lot of different options.”

That diversification proved critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many farms had to pivot quickly as markets and restaurants closed.

“Part of being a sustainable farm is having multiple sales outlets,” she said. “Kitsap Fresh is a piece of that for a lot of farms.”

For McKeirnan, reducing food waste is central.

“That’s one of the big reasons that Kitsap Fresh is really important,” she said. “It keeps local food from having to be shipped and trucked distances, and it prevents fresh food that’s really hard to grow and really expensive from being wasted.”

Aggregation also reduces carbon emissions.

“You can imagine customers are driving to a drop spot,” Ziemann said. “But imagine those same customers all driving to the farm to buy eggs – and then to a different farm to get the other thing they need, and then

*Paul and Sonya of Walker Meadows Farm participate in the cooperative food hub model that supports small and mid-sized farms.*



to a bakery to get bread – versus going to one drop site where we’ve aggregated and distributed all of that. The carbon impact of driving is huge. That’s a role that we’re playing.”

### The Cooperative Model

Kitsap Fresh operates as a cooperative owned by its producers and customers—an intentional departure from profit-driven food distribution models.

“We don’t live within an economic system where cooperatives dominate,” Ziemann said.

The board is working to reaffirm and strengthen that cooperative identity.

“We want to make sure they know that we’re doing it specifically for them and them only,” Ziemann said. “We don’t have a profit motive. We want to be sustainable and financially secure, but the profit piece of it is removed.”

### Challenges - and Perspective

Local food systems face real challenges.

“Local food costs a bit more,” Ziemann said. “We’re paying more for labor. We’re doing more by hand. We just don’t have the economy of scale that other large companies do.”

Weather and crop uncertainty add another layer of complexity. “All the farmers have to predict what they will have available,” McKeirnan said. “But we don’t have a lot of turnaround time if something changes.”

Despite the stress, both leaders emphasize perspective.

“We’re one of the longest-running food hubs in the state,” Ziemann said. “The challenges that we are facing are not unique to us. They’re systemic challenges, not organizational challenges.”

That success is notable in a county not known for agriculture.

“This is not the place you expect a unique cooperative producer agricultural food hub,” she said. “It’s really unique and special that we have it here.”

### Defining Success

For McKeirnan, success is longevity.

“For me, success would be seeing Kitsap Fresh continue to thrive and serve its community,” she said.

Expansion – particularly into South Kitsap – is a long-term goal.

“People want easy access to local food, not just on the weekends,” she said.



*Becky Zaneski and Renee Ziemann of Full Tilth Farm are among the producer-members who rely on Kitsap Fresh for consistent, year-round sales.*

Ziemann measures success culturally.

“I think success looks like a broadening of the idea of local food,” she said. “And a cultural shift towards more local food – even when it’s winter.”

For McKeirnan, that impact is felt at home.

“When I’m making a meal, I feel the love of the people that I know and that support me in the food that I’m preparing,” she said. “It just gives you a really good feeling you don’t get at the grocery store.”

In a county better known for ferries and forests than farmland, Kitsap Fresh has built something unique: a cooperative, producer-led food hub designed for resilience.

“If you don’t have a local network that you’ve continued to support,” Ziemann said, “then disruptions can cause great harm to a community.”

Kitsap Fresh is one answer to that vulnerability – keeping food, relationships and stewardship rooted close to home. ■



# Technology

## Moving From IT Support to IT Strategy

By Jon Hoehne | CMIT Solutions

In my last post, I discussed when DIY IT stops supporting your growth, and it's time to bring in real IT support. When you successfully make the switch, the help desk works and the emergencies calm down. You typically get some time back; your spending is more predictable.

The next opportunity to evaluate is your IT strategy. In other words, how does your use of technology support your business goals and objectives? Do you have the resources and capabilities to meet those goals? How will you prioritize so your business stays focused?

Here's a practical checklist to help you create a basic IT strategy without adding bureaucracy.

### IT Strategy Checklist

#### 1) Put one person in charge of technology decisions (internally)

Even if you outsource IT, you can't outsource ownership. Assign an internal "technology owner" (in a larger business this could be someone in ops or finance) who can approve priorities and budget. This doesn't mean they operate in a vacuum, but if nobody owns the decisions, you'll default to whatever is loudest, newest, or most annoying.

#### 2) Write down 3 business outcomes technology must support

Pick three outcomes for the next 12 months, such as:

- New hires are fully productive on Day 1
- Security is consistent (not dependent on "best effort")
- Leadership gets predictable IT costs and fewer surprises

These outcomes become your filter for

every IT project and purchase. Can't decide what business outcomes are relevant?

There are a lot of ways to build consensus and plan. Use a 60-minute workshop or a good old-fashioned leadership offsite to have everyone express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Lean into your small business advantage. Review your progress frequently and change priorities if the business situation changes.

#### 3) Create a one-page inventory (so you can manage what you have)

If you've got good IT support, this step will be straightforward.

Document:

- Devices (laptops/desktops, any servers, firewall, Wi-Fi)
- Core services (email, file storage, accounting, CRM, line-of-business apps)
- Admin accounts and who has elevated access (including vendors)
- What's "mission critical" vs. "nice to have"

Understanding what you have in place today will help you plan changes.

#### 4) Identify a few standards that align to your outcomes

Standards sound boring. Your internal standards can be crafted in the language and culture of your business. They don't need to be 500-page binders that double as boat anchors.

Start with those business outcomes

and ask yourself: what would need to be true? What rules do we adopt? Using the examples back in step 2, you might get something like this.

#### 5) Build a 12-month roadmap

Scope out the projects needed to achieve the standards you just set for your business. It doesn't need to be a full project plan, but it should include the estimated time, cost, and a definition of "done". Put the projects on a 12-month calendar.

Add your recurring IT activities to the calendar. For example, contract renewals and license renewals, devices that need replacement. Support activities need to continue while you implement changes.

Take a look at what you've built and refine it. Look for order of operations that makes sense, make plans to refine estimates and get more input for detailed planning. Be sure to include your other major commitments. Change takes time and resources, and you will want to avoid overburdening your team if you've got a "busy season" or other major efforts to navigate.

#### 6) Create a monthly technology review

Examples of topics to review include:

- What caused the most interruptions this month?
  - Security status: MFA coverage, patching, backup success, last restore test
  - Upcoming hires/role changes and access needs
  - Roadmap progress (what moved forward?)
  - Budgeted spending versus actuals
- Setting a regular review will help build momentum and deal with obstacles.

### What's the Next Step

If you want to move forward but aren't sure how to prioritize your outcomes because you don't have enough detail or your team disagrees on what matters most, ask your IT partner for a free assessment. It can uncover your top pain points and help you build a roadmap aligned to those three outcomes. ■



OUTCOME	STANDARD TO SUPPORT IT
New hires are fully productive on Day 1	File organization: one primary system of record with clear ownership and permissions
Security is consistent	Identity & access: MFA required, no shared logins, separate admin accounts
Leadership gets predictable IT costs and fewer surprises	Device baseline: minimum specs + a replacement window (so you're not running antiques)

# POULSBO CHAMBER *Member Spotlights*

Thank you to our Chamber members for your continued support and commitment to our local business community. This month we're spotlighting four amazing members, Bremerton Westsound Symphony, The Loft, Millican Crane Service and Linn Insurance Agency.



*Thank you to everyone who joined us at the Poulsbo Chamber Gala!*  
Your presence made the evening truly special, and congratulations to our award winners—  
we're honored to celebrate your outstanding contributions to our community.



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# Human Resources

## Becoming an Employer of Choice in the Puget Sound Region

By Julie Piazza | SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights

The Puget Sound region is a place with many job options. Employees can choose where they want to work, so organizations need to stand out. Becoming an employer of choice is not just a slogan. It is a practical way to attract and keep great employees. When people feel respected, informed, and supported, they bring more energy and ideas to their work. A strong culture does not appear by chance. It grows through clear leadership, steady communication, and a real interest in what employees need to succeed.

Employee engagement surveys are one of the simplest and most effective tools for understanding workplace culture. These surveys give employees a safe way to share honest feedback about their work experience. Leaders gain clear insight into what is working and what needs improvement. When organizations listen and act on the feedback, employees see that their voices matter. This builds trust and creates a more open and positive environment.

Workforce data from Washington State shows why employee feedback is important. Many workers say they want respect, openness, trust, and flexibility in their jobs. Strong

relationships with supervisors matter as well. Many people also want the choice to work remotely or in a hybrid schedule. These trends show that workers want clear communication, supportive leaders, and shared responsibility. These qualities depend on daily behavior instead of company size.

This is good news for small and medium sized businesses. Large companies may have formal programs, but smaller organizations offer personal attention and faster decisions. Employees often have direct access to owners and senior leaders. This closeness helps build trust and a sense of community. It also helps teams adapt when goals or conditions change. These strengths make it very possible for smaller organizations to become employers of choice.

There are several benefits to earning this reputation. One is stronger recruitment. Job seekers want to know how companies treat their people. They read online reviews, look at social media, and talk to past or current employees. They look for signs of a healthy workplace. When organizations use engagement surveys and share their

improvements, they show that leadership cares about employees and their experience.

Another benefit is higher retention. In small and mid sized organizations, each person plays an important role. Losing even one employee can slow progress and increase stress. Workplaces that focus on respect, communication, and clear expectations are more likely to keep people. Employees stay when they feel valued, understand what is expected of them, and see room to grow.

When they feel supported, they are less likely to look for another job.

A third benefit is greater resilience. The Puget Sound region changes often, with shifts in industries, markets, and community needs. Organizations with strong cultures can manage these changes more easily.

Employees who trust their leaders and coworkers work well together during stressful times.

They stay focused on shared goals, which creates stability. This is especially important for smaller businesses, where teamwork has a direct impact on performance. When people feel connected and secure, they are more confident in solving problems and meeting challenges.

Becoming an employer of choice does not require expensive perks or large budgets. It requires purpose, clarity, and fairness in daily decisions. Successful workplaces follow simple habits. They communicate often and clearly. They set realistic expectations. They check in with employees regularly. They offer flexibility when they can. They support both professional growth and personal wellbeing. Most of all, they welcome feedback and take action.

Organizations ready to begin can start by listening. Engagement surveys offer a reliable way to gather honest information. The next step is to share results with employees and choose a few meaningful actions. Small steps build trust when leaders explain their plans and follow through. Over time, this creates a steady cycle of listening and improvement that strengthens the culture.

In the end, becoming an employer of choice is about respecting the human side of work. People want to feel seen, respected, and supported. When leaders create these conditions, organizations thrive. In a region as fast moving as Puget Sound, culture is not just a competitive advantage. It is the foundation for long term success. ■





## Puget Sound's Rebuilders

How Puget Sound Restoration Fund is stitching marine life back together, one oyster and kelp blade at a time

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

On a calm morning in Liberty Bay, the water looks deceptively whole. The tide rises and falls. Gulls sweep overhead. Boats idle past Poulsbo's shoreline. But beneath the surface, the architecture that once defined this inland sea - reef-building oysters, towering kelp forests, intricate webs of forage and shelter - has been profoundly altered.

For nearly three decades, the Bainbridge Island-based Puget Sound Restoration Fund has been diligently rebuilding that architecture, piece by piece.

"We are an organization that is dedicated to - and very good at - restoring marine habitats throughout Puget Sound for people and place," said Executive Director Jodie Toft. "At the core of all we do is making sure that we are keeping that focus on restoring native oysters, restoring native abalone,

restoring native kelp."

Founded in 1997 by Betsy Peabody, PSRF began as a small, nimble nonprofit experimenting on Washington's tideflats and nearshore waters. Today, it has grown into what Toft describes as a midsize organization. The mission, however, remains intensely hands-on.

"We're actively doing restoration," she said. "We're actively learning from that restoration so that we can do it better. We do this work with many, and we do this work for many."

PSRF's work blends science, community engagement, tribal partnership, policy navigation and increasingly, circular-economy innovation. It is environmental stewardship grounded in operations, logistics and long-term financial strategy - a sustainability model built for the real world.



Jodie Toft, Executive Director Puget Sound Restoration Fund

### Rebuilding a Lost Oyster

One of PSRF's most visible success stories begins in Liberty Bay.

Historically, Puget Sound's only native oyster - the Olympia oyster - covered an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 acres of intertidal habitat across the inland sea. By 2010, only about 4 percent of that habitat remained.

"The Olympia oyster population has pretty much been erased from Puget Sound," Toft said. "With that species gone, you've essentially shut down a food factory that

juvenile Chinook and chum salmon would like to eat from."

Oyster beds are not simply clusters of shellfish. They are three-dimensional habitat – living reefs that filter water, stabilize sediments and host a diversity of invertebrates. Remove them, and the ecosystem loses both structure and resilience.

Toft frames restoration in terms familiar to investors and business leaders: risk management through diversification.

"I am somebody who, hook, line, and sinker, subscribes to the idea of managing your risk through a portfolio," she said. "If you don't have a bunch of different types of organisms doing what they've evolved to do, you're not able to absorb the changes and the risk you see in the marine ecosystem."

In Liberty Bay, PSRF and partners worked to restore that missing piece of the portfolio. Using a conservation hatchery near Port Orchard, they raise Olympia oyster larvae and deploy them through a "cultch-on-shell" method. Bags of bare Pacific oyster shell are placed in cold tubs, larvae are added, and when ready to settle, the larvae cement themselves onto the shell. Those seeded shells are then spread across tideflats where oysters once thrived.

The work required patience: securing permits, collaborating with tribal and agency partners, working with shoreline property owners, and repeatedly adding shell and seed. Early gains can feel incremental.

"When a population has been decimated, it's hard to figure out how to celebrate success," Toft said. "You're like, wow, we just

*Juvenile pinto abalone are grown at the PSRF hatchery before being released in Puget Sound.*



**Photo Courtesy  
of PSRF**

keep chipping away at it."

But the results in Liberty Bay have been dramatic. From fewer than 10,000 native oysters, the population is now estimated at 3 to 4 million and growing.

"In a couple of places, like Liberty Bay, we actually think we're done," Toft said. "We don't think we need to do anything else for that population. We've started what I call the restoration flywheel. You add some seed, you add some habitat, and then it gets going, and you see exponential growth."

For restoration professionals – and for funders – crossing that threshold matters. It demonstrates that long-term, science-driven investment can produce measurable ecological return.

"There's an emotional impact to that for those of us who do this work," she said. "It sets the bar that you can do it, it's going to work, and you're going to see that happen in a pretty short amount of time."

## Regrowing a Forest Underwater

If oysters are the bricks in Puget Sound's marine architecture, bull kelp is the forest canopy.

"Bull kelp is our canopy kelp that goes from seafloor to surface," Toft said. "It's our forest-builder kelp in Puget Sound. It really is that true forest builder."

Off Bainbridge Island's north end near Jefferson Head, historic charts once marked a dense kelp bed. By the early 1990s, it had largely disappeared. The loss carried ecological and cultural weight, particularly for the Suquamish Tribe.

"Leonard Forsman, the chairman of the Suquamish Tribe, said to PSRF, 'You're interested in kelp, and I think that you should work on trying to bring this kelp bed back,'"

*PSRF diver Brian Allen examines reproductive patches (i.e., sori) on bull kelp blades at PSRF's bull kelp restoration site near Indianola.*



*Betsy Peabody (PSRF), Sophia O'Connell (PSRF) and Sebastian Bell (kelp gardening volunteer) wrap biodegradable twine seeded with small bull kelp onto a rock, to be 'planted' from a boat or paddleboard into an underwater kelp garden along the shores of Bainbridge Island, WA.*

Toft recalled. "We said, 'Okay, yes, that sounds great. Let's get to it!'"

"Getting to it" meant years of experimentation: producing bull kelp seed, engineering outplanting systems, navigating marine permitting and iterating through setbacks. In 2020, PSRF and partners outplanted seeded lines on the seafloor.

"For the first time in any of the work that we've done, that kelp grew from the seafloor all the way to the surface," Toft said. "We regrew that canopy."

Each year since, the kelp has returned, forming what she describes as "kelp curtains." Natural recruitment – spores reseeding the bed without human assistance – is beginning to take hold.

"We're seeing more of what we call natural recruitment," she said. "We still think we have quite a ways to go, but to be able to have these forests in an area where they haven't been growing for 30 years – that has been

huge.”

For Toft, the significance extends beyond habitat metrics.

“It’s the idea that we don’t just have to study things as they go away,” she said. “We can get in there, we can take action, we can bring these forests back.”

### Partnerships as Infrastructure

In marine waters, restoration cannot be transactional.

“To do work in water, you really need that work to be born from partnerships, otherwise it won’t be long-lasting,” Toft said.

Unlike terrestrial conservation, marine projects cannot simply rely on land acquisition. Ownership systems are complex. Water moves. Species migrate. Tribal treaty rights shape management decisions.

“Individual tribes are not stakeholders; they’re rights holders,” Toft said. “They’re driving toward a seventh-generation vision of abundance that is place-based for their tribal members and their culture.”

That alignment of long-term vision makes collaboration not just respectful, but strategic. It also reflects a distinctly Washington model of marine governance – one that has produced durable restoration networks.

### Funding the Future

Even the most elegant ecological design requires financial infrastructure.

“We have to pay people to do work,” Toft said.

PSRF relies on a blend of federal and state grants, competitive foundation funding, individual donors and mission-aligned events. One such event, Seattle’s annual “Oyster New Year” celebration at Elliott’s Oyster House, raises funds while spotlighting the very bounty PSRF aims to protect.

“All of our events are very food-forward,” Toft said. “Every time you’re coming to an event like that, you should have the opportunity to celebrate the bounty of what these marine waters are giving us.”

Competition for grant dollars, however, is intensifying.

“There are not that many competitive grants out there, and the ones that foundations are putting out are getting absolutely swamped,” she said.

In response, PSRF is thinking more like a green enterprise – seeking cross-sector



*A PSRF diver surveys outplanted bull kelp growing along an anchored longline at PSRF's bull kelp restoration site near Indianola.*

innovation and circular solutions.

### Closing the Loop on Shell

One promising initiative is shell recycling.

In the Pacific Northwest, used oyster, clam and mussel shells from restaurants typically enter the waste or compost stream. Yet those shells are precisely what restoration projects need to rebuild reef structure.

“Each one of those shells is like a sign of alchemy,” Toft said. “A tiny organism has been grabbing nutrients, calcium, all of these things out of the surrounding waters and imaginably turning it into these beautiful shells – and then we throw them away.”

PSRF has begun piloting shell collection, working with restaurants, shellfish growers and regulators to ensure disease risks are minimized. The effort reflects core circular-economy principles: waste reduction, material reuse and local sourcing.

“At the end of the day, I just think this is another place where people can engage,” Toft said.

### Scaling Through Community

Another innovation involves workforce development and distributed restoration.

A teacher at the Puget Sound Skills Center in South Seattle approached PSRF about involving students in shellfish restoration. The first attempt faltered.

“It totally didn’t work,” Toft said. “Classic failing forward.”

After refining the system, students achieved high settlement rates of Olympia oysters on shell.

“We had insanely high counts of little baby oysters on the shell,” she said. “Those high school kids knocked it out of the park with their teacher.”

By replicating small hatchery systems in community spaces – such as the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend – PSRF can expand capacity without expanding its

physical footprint. The approach increases production while building local stewardship and technical skills.

“There’s a lot of work that needs to be done, and it’s not going to be done by one small nonprofit,” Toft said. “What tools can we give people so they can be real players in marine restoration?”

### Sustainability as Commitment

Restoration is iterative. Conditions shift. Not every year is a breakthrough year.

“One thing I wish more people understood is that iteration is a huge part of restoration,” Toft said. “Even if you have a tool figured out, it’s such a variable environment out there that you’re always trying to thread a pretty small needle.”

Sustainability, for PSRF, is not branding. It is duration.

“I think sustainability means a commitment to long-term action,” she said. “That’s what we’re looking to sustain.”

Despite funding uncertainties, ocean acidification and climate pressures, Toft remains optimistic.

“I just see people as invested in this place in such a deep way,” she said. “There is already a really strong connection between people and place, and it’s not hard to do, because this place has so much to offer.”

“The marine ecosystem is remarkably resilient,” she added. “People really love this place and these waters. Those two things combined give us a lot of reason to feel positive and hopeful about what Puget Sound will continue to do for us and with us.”

In an era when environmental headlines often focus on loss, PSRF’s work offers a different narrative – one of practical hope, disciplined science and collaborative green enterprise. It is the quiet work of rebuilding foundations. And beneath the surface of Puget Sound, that work is beginning to hold. ■



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# Health & Wellness

## Springtime Wellness for Seniors

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



As the cold of winter fades, springtime offers a perfect, rejuvenating opportunity for seniors to reset wellness routines and embrace a more active lifestyle. In senior living communities, celebrating springtime means transitioning from indoor activities to vibrant outdoor ones.

Outdoor activities boost vitamin D while enhancing mobility and allowing a connection with nature. Seniors can look forward to specialized programming that include gardening and walking clubs whether they live in a senior living community or visiting a senior center.

Here are a few spring wellness ideas that individuals and senior living communities can add to their routine that focus on a holistic blend of physical movement, cognitive engagement, and social connection to capitalize on the renewing energy of Spring.



### Physical Wellness & Outdoor Activities

Planning and organizing the following options allow individuals to enjoy the area while boosting cardiovascular health and vitamin D levels. Destinations can be unplanned too. Getting outside and walking a loop around the neighborhood offers similar benefits.

- Walking
- Outdoor Fitness like tai chi

- Gardening
- Water Aerobic

### Cognitive & Creative

The following activities focus on reducing anxiety, providing a meaningful sense of control, and focus on fine motor skills and self-expression.

- Nature-Inspired Arts & Crafts
- Birdwatching
- Spring Cleaning & Decluttering

### Social & Nutrition

Soaking up the sun outside is wonderful with fellow friends, families, and residents. Social gatherings such as picnics allow for camaraderie and bonding while also getting the necessary vitamin D. Springtime acts as a catalyst for social and nutritional revitalization, transforming routine care into a more engaging, community-driven experience. When social interaction meets nutritional quality, the benefits can multiply.

- Socials
- Farmers' Market
- Cooking Classes

### Intergenerational Activities

The best part of springtime activities is joining with the littler ones in the family or community. Many communities partner with a school district and offer an intergenerational bridging of the gap

between youth and seniors. It fosters mutual respect and understanding through shared seasonal experiences.

These programs can also provide seniors with a renewed sense of purpose while offering the younger generations with valuable life lessons and mentorship.

The popular springtime intergenerational activities include community gardening, craft workshops, picnics, mentorship and reading. Youths and seniors are able to collaborate to share traditional wisdom and introduce modern techniques such as vertical gardening. Outdoor gatherings such as social picnics and barbecues provide an opportune environment for storytelling and memory sharing. Older adults reading to younger students and kids have been shown to improve reading scores and social-emotional development in children.

Ultimately, embracing springtime wellness does more than fill a calendar, it fundamentally restores a sense of vitality and purpose for older adults.

Trade the confinement of winter for the social and physical engagement of the outdoors. This can significantly reduce the feelings of isolation and improve their cognitive health.

Whether through the quiet joy of a gardening and walking club or the lively energy of intergenerational events, these seasonal shifts ensure that aging is met with growth, connection, and a high quality of life. Spring back into life—because wellness is a season, not just a goal. ■

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## Feature

# Rooted in Community

## How Kitsap Community Food Co-op Is Growing a Sustainable Local Food Economy

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

In downtown Bremerton, inside a modest storefront on Park Avenue, a small grocery store is quietly modeling what a sustainable local economy can look like.

At roughly 1,800 square feet, Kitsap Community Food Co-op is compact. Its ambitions are not. Built on shared ownership, local sourcing, food access and waste reduction, the member-owned grocery has become both a retailer and a piece of community infrastructure – one that keeps food dollars circulating close to home.

The co-op offers a clear example of how environmental stewardship and economic resilience can work hand in hand.

### A Grocery Store Owned by Its Community

Kitsap Community Food Co-op operates as a member-owned, not-for-profit grocery. Anyone can shop there, but more than 1,600 people have chosen to invest directly in the store's future by becoming member-owners.

Membership requires a \$200 lifetime



Photos Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Store Manager Emily Houchin holds fresh oranges in the produce section at Kitsap Community Food Co-op in Bremerton.

share, payable upfront or in monthly increments of \$10–\$20. In exchange, members gain voting rights, access to board meetings and a direct voice in store governance.

"You're becoming an owner of your grocery store," store manager Emily Houchin said. "You have voting rights. You can go to board meetings, you can be part of the governance of the store. And it's a very open concept with the store manager. I'm always encouraging our member-owners to let us know what they want to see in their store."

That governance structure is not symbolic. Roughly half of the products on the shelves

today are there because members requested them.

"I think it's just a matter of putting your money where your morals are," Houchin said. "You're deciding to support local businesses and local farms, while also having ownership and being a part of this community."

Members also receive tangible benefits: a monthly 10% off coupon, 5% off bulk items year-round and 10% off case orders.

### A Long-Planned Vision

Though the storefront opened in 2019, the co-op's origins stretch back nearly two decades. Community organizers began

recruiting founding member-owners around 2008, long before there was a physical space. A small pop-up location helped build awareness and test demand before the Park Avenue store opened its doors.

Today, the co-op carries a full range of groceries – scaled down but comprehensive.

"We have just about everything you can find in the big department stores, just at a much smaller scale," Houchin said.

The store includes fresh produce, dairy, pantry staples, bulk goods, health and beauty items, household essentials and grab-and-go meals popular with shipyard workers and downtown employees.

### Supporting Local Farms - and the Local Economy

The produce department is the store's top-selling section and the clearest reflection of its sustainability strategy.

"All of our produce is either organic or listed as local," Houchin said.

Many partner farms use organic practices without

formal certification; those items are labeled local. During peak season, the co-op works with roughly 35 local farms. Some products arrive through food hubs such as Kitsap Fresh and South Sound Fresh. Much of the sourcing, however, happens directly with farms in Bremerton, Poulsbo, Kingston and surrounding communities.

"We acknowledge which farm it comes from, so the customer can see, 'Oh, I'm getting these carrots, and they came from Around the Table, and their farm is in Poulsbo,'" Houchin said. "That's cool and pretty unique to us."

The co-op also partners with small local producers across categories – from dairy to beverages to shelf-stable goods – ensuring that grocery spending supports a network of independent businesses.

"I would say our focus is to support the local economy as much as we can," Houchin said. "Farmers need a place to sell. Farmers markets are a lot of labor, and it's getting tougher. Having grocery stores like us that can support a good amount of their produce is really valuable."

For some shoppers, those local shelf tags are the primary reason they walk through the door.

"We have customers who only want to buy local," she notes. "They come in and look for those local tags because that's the only thing they want to purchase."

### Increasing Access in a Food Desert

Location is central to the co-op's mission. Downtown Bremerton

*The co-op's bulk section includes refillable dish soap, hand soap and other household cleaning products to help customers reduce single-use plastic waste.*



*A selection of bulk spices is displayed at Kitsap Community Food Co-op, allowing shoppers to buy small quantities and cut down on food and packaging waste.*

has limited full-service grocery options, particularly for residents without reliable transportation.

"We feel like it's kind of a food desert down here," Houchin said. "Being here is about offering more accessibility for those who might be traveling by foot or by bike, who don't necessarily have a car or the means of getting to a grocery store. It's about reaching areas that deserve to have access to food that's within reach."

The co-op reinforces that commitment through partnerships and food recovery programs. It serves as a drop-off site for Kitsap Harvest, which distributes surplus produce to seniors. Customers and local growers can donate fresh items that are then redistributed.

The store also donates suitable surplus and short-dated foods to Food Line and The People's Exchange.

"We're supporting these organizations while also making sure good food gets to people who need it," Houchin said.



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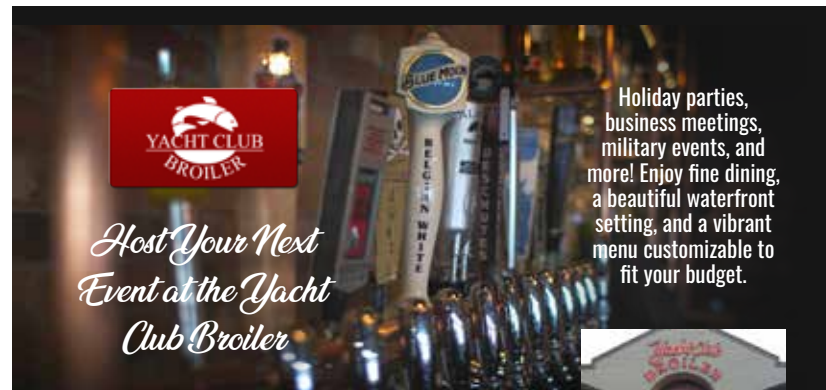
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## Feature

### Affordability as a Sustainability Strategy

Operating at a smaller scale comes with financial challenges. Limited storage means smaller orders, which can result in higher per-unit costs. To offset that reality and maintain accessibility, the co-op has layered in targeted affordability programs.

The FLOWER program – Fresh, Local, Organic Within Everyone's Reach – provides a reduced-cost membership for customers using EBT or SNAP.

"Anyone who is on EBT or SNAP benefits can become a member with us for only \$2 a month," Houchin explains. "They get 10% off in the store all the time, not just once a month."

The store also participates in SNAP Match, providing \$5 off for every \$10 spent on eligible produce.

"We do it live in the transaction," Houchin said. "If someone has \$30 worth of produce, we'll ring it up in \$10 increments so they get \$5 off each \$10. We're willing to do multiple transactions to make sure they get the full benefit."

Together, these programs position affordability not as an afterthought, but as an integral part of a sustainable food system.

### Sustainability in Practice

The co-op's environmental efforts show up in daily operations.

A robust bulk section reduces packaging waste and allows customers to purchase only what they need. Shoppers are encouraged to bring their own containers.

"We have a system where they can weigh



their empty container at a scale next to the bulk section, then fill it up," Houchin said.

At checkout, plastic bags are not provided.

"We don't do any plastic bags at checkout," she said. "We just recycle whatever boxes we get from our trucks for customers to use, as well as paper bags. We'll take donated bags for people to use, but we don't provide any plastic bags."

Even product sourcing reflects sustainability values. The store carries milk in returnable glass bottles from Twinbrook Creamery and bulk goods from Hummingbird Wholesale, a distributor known for ethical sourcing practices.

### Powered by Volunteers, Guided by Committees

The co-op operates with a lean paid staff supplemented by volunteers who stock shelves, clean and support operations.

"We're a skeleton crew," Houchin said. "So having volunteer help is really awesome."

As the co-op prepares for expansion, three committees are playing key roles: Financial Campaign, Community Engagement and Business Development.

"We're really calling for people to join our committees, especially now that we're

doing the relocation project," Houchin said. "We need help to get this thing moving."

### Outgrowing the Space

After years of steady growth, the Park Avenue location has become a constraint. Limited parking, minimal storage and reduced visibility have capped sales potential.

A market analysis and pro forma confirmed what leadership suspected.

"We got a market analysis done. The board has decided that we have to move," Houchin said. "We're getting ready to start a capital campaign fund, and we're still looking at sites. We don't have anything locked in yet."

The goal is to roughly double the store's footprint to around 3,000 square feet, improving storage, pricing flexibility and product selection while remaining grounded in Bremerton.

"The board decided they want to stay in Bremerton," Houchin said. "We would love to stay more downtown, because we see a real necessity to remain in town rather than be on the big strip. Our market analysis said we'd make the most money if we went onto Wheaton Way and Highway 303. We're looking at it, but it's not where our heart wants to be."

### More Than a Store

Events like the annual "Sow & Grow" celebration extend the co-op's reach beyond retail, bringing together farms and food organizations each spring.

"They've been really successful," Houchin said. "They drive a big crowd. We've been very lucky with the weather the last couple of years. I'm excited about it – we're hoping to have even more vendors this year. More than anything, we just need people to shop in our store to keep us going so we can get this new location in the works."

Ultimately, the co-op's model rests on a simple premise: shared ownership strengthens local resilience.

"I hope people take away that they're getting good quality products," Houchin said. "And that their dollars spent here are



*A customer checks out at Kitsap Community Food Co-op, a member-owned grocery store in downtown Bremerton focused on local sourcing and sustainability.*



*The produce department at Kitsap Community Food Co-op features organic and locally sourced fruits and vegetables, many supplied by farms in Kitsap County and the surrounding region.*

supporting a whole community of businesses – from family-owned companies like Azure Standard to farms right here in Bremerton. When you shop at the co-op, you're not just filling your pantry. You're investing in the local food system."

As Kitsap Community Food

Co-op prepares for its next chapter, its sustainability story is less about scale and more about structure – a business owned by its shoppers, designed to serve its neighbors, and committed to keeping both food and opportunity rooted in Kitsap County. ■

*Customers can bring their own jars and containers to fill from the co-op's bulk bins, purchasing only what they need while minimizing packaging.*



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# The Ecosystem Edge

INSIGHTS FOR BUILDERS, BACKERS, AND BELIEVERS

## Culture Is The Real Accelerator

### Why startup ecosystems rise – or stall – based on the culture we build together

By **Michele Bianchi** | Principal, Michele Bianchi Communication Design | Board Member, Matchstick Lab

The future of a resilient startup community in Kitsap County won't be shaped by who raises the most money – it'll be shaped by who builds the strongest culture. Capital and talent may be easier to measure, but they're not what holds a place together when things get hard and a start-up falters. Culture is quieter, often overlooked – but it's what separates startup ecosystems that thrive from those that stall out.

#### Beyond Ping Pong Tables and Company Perks

Culture doesn't mean free bottles of water in a fridge or a ping-pong table in the reception area. And it isn't just about what happens inside a single company. Yes, internal culture – how a startup treats its team, handles setbacks and lives its values – matters. But equally important is building a start-up ecosystem culture: the broader environment founders operate in. It's the social norms, support systems and shared expectations that determine whether people take risks, share knowledge and help one another. When that external culture is strong, startups have a better chance of surviving and growing.

A 2023 global AWS survey of startup leaders found that **86% believe culture is critical to growth, and 85% said it directly impacts their ability to attract talent and investment.** While that survey focused on culture *within* startups, it points to something larger: the surrounding climate matters just as much. Founders build better

companies when they operate in a community that values collaboration, shares hard-won knowledge and treats failure as part of the process.

In other words, a healthy startup ecosystem culture makes strong internal cultures possible – and more durable.

#### So How Do You Build Ecosystem Culture?

You start by making founder-to-founder support a norm, not an exception. That might look like open "office hours" where experienced founders meet with early-stage entrepreneurs, peer mentorship programs or regular informal meetups. In smaller communities like ours, this can be a major strength.

Second, you celebrate real stories – not just the wins, but the pivots, the setbacks, the almost-gave-ups. Highlighting and sharing success is important, but if that's all founders see, it can create the false impression that struggle is a sign of personal failure. When we normalize the messy, nonlinear path of building something new, we make it easier for early-stage entrepreneurs to stick with it. Stories of local founders who hit roadblocks, regrouped and came back stronger help shift the narrative. They show that challenge isn't



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

the exception – it's the path. And that makes people more likely to try, and more likely to stay.

Third, you treat culture as a shared resource. That means building in moments of reflection: What kind of founders do we want to attract? What kind of community do we want to build? What values are we modeling? Are we designing programs, funding and spaces with our community in mind – or just products?

#### Kitsap's Cultural Advantage

For places like Kitsap County, this approach makes sense. We may not have the density of a major metro, but we do have a strong sense of place, longstanding networks of trust and a history of helping each other. That's the raw material of startup culture. The key is to recognize it, invest in it and keep showing up.

Because at the end of the day, startups in Kitsap don't grow just because of code or cash. They grow because someone offered help at the right time. Because hard moments weren't hidden. Because the community made it easier to stay and keep building, instead of leaving and starting over somewhere else.

Culture doesn't just support entrepreneurship. It lays the foundation for resilient communities and durable services – businesses that aren't just built to scale, but built to stay put. That's the kind of economy worth investing in. One where people grow roots, face hard challenges head-on, and create lasting value for their community. ■





# January Membership Luncheon

It's a new year, and the Chamber is excited to introduce new member benefits. At our January luncheon, Chamber President Irene Moyer

highlighted existing benefits while also welcoming guest speakers who shared new offerings coming to the Chamber in 2026. Brennan Jacobsen from

the Latitude 48 Group discussed support options for small businesses navigating Washington State's new retirement requirements, while

James Dooley from Fiserv shared details about a new Member Advantage merchant program offering affordable services for Chamber members. ■



## Chamber Members Shine in 20 Under 40 Awards

Congratulations to our Board Director and Advocacy Chair, Alysa Grimes, on being honored as

one of this year's 20 Under 40 award recipients! We are lucky to have her serve at the Chamber and in our

community. We also extend our congratulations to the fellow Chamber members and business leaders who were

celebrated alongside her. Thank you for the impact you make in the Greater Kitsap community!



Alysa Grimes & Carli Meurs



Irene Moyer, Alysa Grimes and John Morrissey

# Advocacy Committee Makes Impact at Olympia Legislative Hill Climb

On January 27, members of the Greater Kitsap Chamber of Commerce Advocacy Committee joined the Association of Washington Business (AWB) Legislative Hill Climb in Olympia to ensure Kitsap business voices were heard at the state capitol.

Our team met directly with 26th District Representatives Michelle Valdez and Addison Richards, and 23rd District Representatives Greg Nance and Tarra Simmons, to discuss

the committee's legislative priorities. We provided detailed information on key bills affecting our members, sharing specific reasons why these legislators should support or oppose measures that will impact Kitsap businesses.

The day also featured Governor Bob Ferguson's address on the state budget, where he emphasized his commitment to balancing the budget through collaborative work with the Legislature, which is a critical



issue for business stability.

Committee members attended public hearings to observe the legislative process firsthand and participated in AWB-hosted information sessions covering workforce development, employment law, tax and fiscal policy, and housing. These sessions provided valuable insights into how state lawmakers are working to support Washington businesses and highlighted emerging legislative

trends that could affect our local economy.

This direct engagement demonstrates the Chamber's commitment to proactive advocacy. By building relationships with our representatives and staying informed on legislative developments, the Advocacy Committee ensures that Kitsap business interests are represented when it matters most.



## GKC Team at the Annual W.A.C.E. Conference

In February, the Greater Kitsap Chamber team, Irene Moyer and Kara Shepard, traveled to Tucson for the annual Western Association of Chamber Executives (W.A.C.E.) Conference. It was a great week of professional development,

filled with new ideas and strategies to help us better serve and support our local business community.

A special congratulations to our President & CEO, Irene Moyer, on her graduation from the W.A.C.E. Academy!



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Since joining the Chamber, their team has demonstrated

consistent engagement - attending luncheons, Off the Clock events, and Chamber programs that strengthen local partnerships.

### Where Hospitality Meets Community

Fairfield Inn & Suites Bremerton has been a steadfast supporter of community and economic vitality. Their dedication extends beyond offering comfortable accommodations - they've been an active collaborator in efforts to highlight what makes Bremerton a unique and thriving destination.

Notably, their partnership with the Chamber and Visit Kitsap Peninsula in the creation of a video advertisement showcased not only their professionalism but their genuine enthusiasm for elevating our region's visibility.

### A Partner You Can Count On

What sets Fairfield Inn & Suites apart is the reliability and warmth of their team.

Over the years, they have consistently shown a willingness to support local initiatives, engage with other businesses, and contribute to the Chamber's mission

of fostering a vibrant Kitsap economy.

Their openness, responsiveness, and collaborative spirit make them a valued partner and a shining example of how businesses can uplift their community.

Whether hosting guests for leisure, business, or naval travel, Fairfield Inn & Suites Bremerton delivers comfort with a personal touch - while staying deeply connected to the place they serve.

Visit their website to learn more about their amenities, hospitality, and commitment to Bremerton.

## Miss PKS Titleholders Crowned

Congratulations to the new titleholders for the Miss Poulsbo, Miss Kitsap, Miss Silverdale Scholarship Organization: (pictured from left) Miss Poulsbo, Madison Coulston, Miss Kitsap, Paulyne Crouse, and Miss Silverdale, Marcelene Alina.



Irene Moyer, Kitsap County Commissioner Katie Walters, Poulsbo Mayor Ed Stern



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GREATER KITSAP CHAMBER / KITSAP BUSINESS

25



## New and Renewal Memberships for January

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

### Main Street

Kitsap Transit (2014)  
 Ryan, Montgomery & Saunders, Inc. P.S. (1999)  
 Swire Coca-Cola (2006)

### Business

Business Health Trust (2023)

Cavalon Aesthetics at the Doctors Clinic (2005)  
 Central Kitsap Food Bank (1991)  
 Dispute Resolution Center of Kitsap County (2013)  
 Hanley Construction (2012)  
 Home Instead (2016)

### Innpowerment (2025)

JWJ Group (2022)  
 KidVantage (2016)  
 Kitsap County Association of Realtors (2021)  
 Kitsap Public Facilities District (2016)  
 Kitsap Regional Library Foundation (2021)  
 Nutrition World (2016)  
 RE/MAX Anchor (2023)

Reid Property Management LLC (2019)  
 Salvation Army Community Center (1983)  
 Sanchez, Mitchell, Eastman, & Cure, PSC (2020)  
 Seaport Salon Spa (2007)  
 Silverdale Technology LLC (2020)  
 Silverdale Wellness Center (1991)  
 Silvia Klatman (2024)

**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.**

## Advocacy Committee Engages at Bremerton Town Hall

On January 31, the Advocacy Committee attended a town hall at the Norm Dicks Government Center hosted by Bremerton Mayor Greg Wheeler, 23rd Legislative District Representative Greg Nance, and 26th Legislative District Representative Addison Richards. The event provided valuable insight into legislative priorities and local concerns affecting Kitsap businesses and residents. Key topics discussed included:

**Tax Fairness and Budget:** Officials addressed Washington's 49th-out-of-50 ranking for tax fairness and the need to evaluate current spending in

the budget. Proposals included targeted sales tax relief and tax breaks for small businesses employing Kitsap residents.

**Housing and Homelessness:** Representatives discussed the Mile Hill project, efforts to maintain Salvation Army services, and new state legislation to simplify permitting and address 3-5 year housing waitlists.

**Immigration Enforcement:** Legislators outlined bills requiring marked ICE vehicles and uniforms, warrant requirements for private spaces, and protections preventing state sharing of Dreamer information with federal authorities.

**Revenue Proposals:** The Well Washington Fund (HB 2100) drew discussion, with concerns raised about Seattle's experience with similar taxation and suggestions for alternative revenue sources including data center taxes and B&O adjustments.

The town hall demonstrated the importance of direct constituent engagement in shaping policy decisions. The Advocacy Committee will continue monitoring these issues as they affect our business community.



(left to right) Representative Greg Nance, Mayor Greg Wheeler, Representative Addison Richards.



(left to right) Representative Addison Richards, GKC Advocacy Chair Alysa Grimes, Representative Greg Nance.

**GREATER KITSAP CHAMBER + LEADERSHIP KITSAP PRESENT**  
**Kitsap Women's SUMMIT**  
 March 19, 2026 | Kitsap Conference Center

**PRESENTERS**

- "Unshaken: Staying True to Self in Unfamiliar Territory" - TRACY FLOOD-HARRIS, ANNA FLOOD, DR. JENEISE BRIGGS, SADIE HOUSTON
- "From Misunderstood to Understood: Tools for Relational Breakthrough Across Differences" - STEPHANIE MIKULASEK
- "How Your WHY Can Guide Your WHAT and Anchor Your WHO" - LAURIE CAMERON
- "The Freedom and Flexibility Formula: Build Momentum Toward a Life You Love" - LISA KERWIN
- "Shelf Life: The Art of Knowing When to Pivot and How to Begin Again" - MONICA DOWNEN
- "Showing Up Anyway: The Power of Authentic Presence" - WHITNEY TATUM
- "The Conflict Beneath the Conflict" - CARA WILSON

THE KITSAP WOMEN'S SUMMIT IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY **Business Health Trust**

## The Next Chapter: Gratitude, Growth, and What's Ahead



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

**W**hen I started writing this column for Kitsap Business Magazine in early 2025, the goal was simple: make financial planning feel practical. Less intimidating. Less abstract. More real.

Money can feel complicated. Markets can feel unpredictable. And financial independence can feel like something meant for "someday."

Over the past year we've covered income strategies, tax planning, emotional investing, gratitude, volatility, and what it really means to build independence instead of just chasing a retirement date. My hope was never that you'd overhaul everything overnight. Just that you'd take one idea and apply it.

This will be my final column for Kitsap Business Magazine, at least for now.

Not because I'm slowing down. If anything, the opposite.

### A New Season

The next chapter is focused on expanding the Fearless message beyond these pages.

My book, *Fearless: Creating Financial Independence in an Age of Uncertainty*, is launching in April. Alongside that, we're rolling out a new podcast and video series, *Fearless Perspectives*, as well as live workshops built around the same core idea we've talked about here again and again:

Financial independence isn't about a magic retirement age. It's about owning your time.

Those projects take time and energy to build well. And if there's one principle I try to live by, it's this: your time is your most valuable asset. So I'm choosing to focus it

intentionally.

### A Thank You to Kitsap

Before turning the page, I want to say thank you.

Kitsap is full of thoughtful business owners, disciplined savers, hardworking public servants, and families trying to balance today's expenses with tomorrow's goals. I've had more hallway conversations, coffee shop discussions, and grocery store chats about financial planning than I ever expected. And I'm grateful for every one of them.

Financial education matters. Not because everyone needs complex strategies, but because everyone benefits from clarity.

### If I Could Leave You With One Thing

If there's one idea I'd leave you with from this entire series, it's this:

Financial independence is about optionality.

It's about being able to choose your work instead of needing it.

It's about aligning income, investments, and taxes so they support your life, not just your lifestyle.

It's about making steady, intentional decisions that compound over time.

You don't need a perfect plan. You need a thoughtful one.

You don't need to predict markets. You need discipline.

You don't need to wait for January to make changes.

Know your numbers.

Have a plan.

Review it.

Coordinate your tax and investment strategies.

Don't let short-term noise dictate long-term decisions.

None of that guarantees outcomes. Markets fluctuate. Tax laws change. Life throws curveballs. But clarity and preparation tend to put you in a stronger position than reaction and guesswork.

Whether you follow along through the book, the podcast, a workshop, or simply revisit your own financial plan on your own, my encouragement is the same as it's always been:

Take action.

Clarity builds confidence.

Confidence builds momentum.

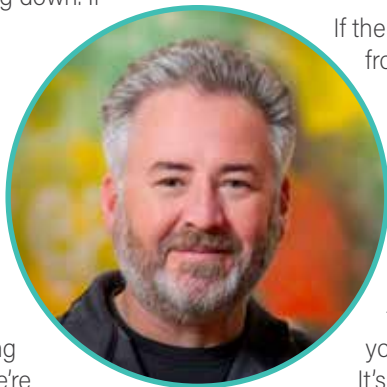
Momentum builds freedom.

Thank you for reading, for the conversations, and for allowing me into your financial thinking this past year. I'm grateful for it.

You will be able to find me at [PeaksFinancial.com](https://PeaksFinancial.com), and by April, *Fearless Perspectives* will be launching on Spotify and YouTube and our videos will be on most social media channels.

*Investment advisory services offered through Raymond James Financial Services Advisors, Inc.*

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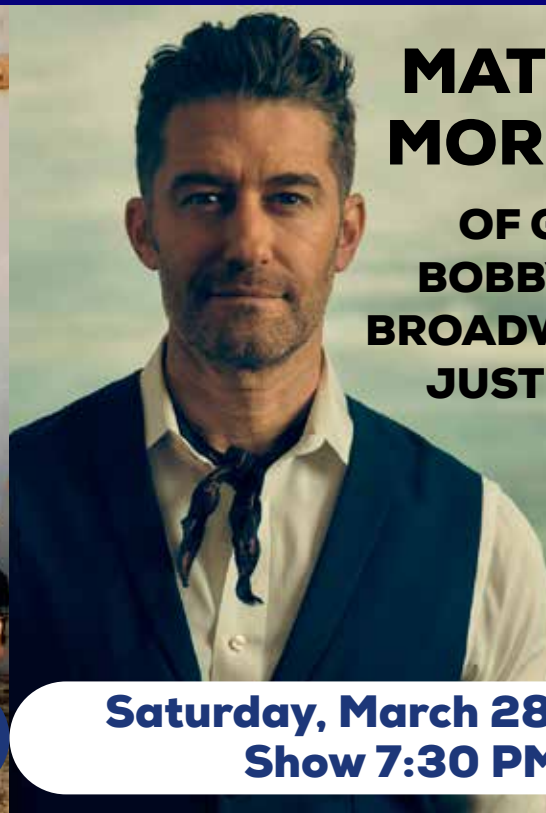
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JUST IN TIME**



**Saturday, March 28, 2026  
Show 7:30 PM**

# Recruitment

## Peak Season, Peak Performance

### Smarter Seasonal Hiring Strategies

By **Monica Blackwood** | President & CEO West Sound Workforce

For many employers across Kitsap and the greater Puget Sound region, seasonality is simply part of doing business. Tax firms surge each spring. Parks and recreation expand when school lets out. Hospitality and tourism spike in the summer. Agriculture follows harvest cycles. Retail experiences multiple swings throughout the year.

Seasonal hiring is not just regular hiring on a shorter timeline. It requires a thoughtful strategy that blends forecasting, flexibility, and strong engagement.

#### Start with Data, Not Panic

The most effective seasonal hiring plans begin months before peak demand.

Review your historical data:

- How much overtime did you pay?
- How many call-outs occurred?
- What were peak sales volumes?
- Did customer complaints increase?
- Has demand grown year over year?

This is data-driven forecasting. It helps determine not just how many people you need, but which roles will have the greatest impact. If customer wait times increased, you may need more front-line staff. If overtime costs ballooned, deeper bench strength may be the answer.

Starting early is especially important when multiple industries are competing for the same seasonal workforce at the same time.

#### Clarity Wins: Tight, Targeted Job Descriptions

Seasonal roles should never be vague – and they should not read like a five-page manual.

Because assignments are short-term, duties and responsibilities should be concise and focused on what truly matters. Overly long job descriptions overwhelm candidates and blur priorities.

A strong seasonal job description should:

- Define the core duties
- Set clear performance expectations
- Clarify schedule requirements
- Outline key physical or technical demands
- Identify the assignment length

Clarity improves candidate quality and reduces early turnover. When expectations are specific and transparent, workers can quickly assess whether the role fits their availability and goals.

#### Know Your Audience: The Flexibility Workforce

Seasonal workers often overlap with individuals who thrive in the gig economy. Many actively seek:

- Short-term commitments
- Predictable timelines
- Supplemental income
- Varied work experiences

Rather than treating seasonal roles as a stopgap, reframe them as structured flexibility. Position your opportunity as organized, reliable, and well-managed, even if temporary.

Transparency is critical. Be upfront about workload intensity, weekend shifts, overtime potential, and assignment length. Clear

communication builds trust and directly supports reliability and retention.

#### Hire for Soft Skills First

Because assignments are time-bound, employers sometimes focus heavily on technical expertise. In reality, seasonal success often hinges on soft skills.

- Prioritize:
- Reliability
- Customer service mindset
- Adaptability
- Team orientation
- Coachability

Technical skills can often be taught through focused onboarding or micro-training. A strong attitude and work ethic are much harder to develop quickly.

It may also be appropriate to streamline parts of your hiring process during seasonal surges, while maintaining compliance. Reducing unnecessary interview layers or accelerating screening timelines can help secure strong candidates before competitors do.

#### Integrate, Don't Isolate

One of the biggest mistakes employers make is holding seasonal workers at arm's length. Seasonal employees should be folded into your workforce and culture:

- Include them in team meetings
- Recognize their contributions
- Pair them with experienced team members
- Provide proper onboarding and safety training

When workers feel like part of the team, they perform like part of the team. Inclusion directly impacts morale, reliability, and customer experience.

Incentivize Completion and Retention

Recruiting is only half the equation. Retention through the end of the assignment matters just as much. Consider:



- Completion or retention bonuses
- Employee meals or shift perks
- Priority scheduling for returning seasonal staff
- Early notification of full-time openings

time openings

- Access to skill-building training
- Returning seasonal employees are especially valuable. They reduce onboarding time and bring institutional knowledge from prior peak seasons. Building a seasonal alumni pool reduces recruiting pressure year after year.

#### Partner with HR Early

Even short-term employees must be hired correctly. Wage and hour compliance, overtime rules, sick leave laws, safety standards, and proper classification all apply.

Before launching your seasonal hiring push:

- Confirm pay practices
- Review overtime projections
- Ensure onboarding documentation is current
- Prepare supervisors

Partnering with your HR team – or an external HR advisor or staffing firm – reduces risk and keeps your focus on operations instead of compliance surprises.

#### Shift the Mindset

Seasonal employees are not "less than." They are strategic capacity builders. When approached intentionally, seasonal hiring can:

- Reduce overtime costs
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Protect employee morale
- Increase revenue during peak cycles

With thoughtful forecasting, targeted recruitment, and creative retention strategies, seasonal hiring becomes less of a scramble and more of a competitive advantage.

Plan early. Hire smart. Keep them engaged – even if it's just for a season. ■

# Q Executive & A



Photos courtesy of Kitsap Transit

One of Kitsap Transit's fast ferries travels its Seattle route, providing a reliable cross-sound commute for Kitsap County residents.

## Meet John Clauson, Executive Director of Kitsap Transit

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Few leaders can say they've grown alongside the organization they now lead. John Clauson can.

Clauson began his career with Kitsap Transit in 1983 as a driver, just as the agency was being established. More than four decades later, he serves as executive director, overseeing a regional transit authority that has expanded to include bus, vanpool and passenger-only ferry services – including the fast ferries that have reshaped cross-sound commuting.

Under Clauson's leadership since 2012, Kitsap Transit has grown to more than 500 employees and has earned national recognition for innovation, particularly in marine services and clean transportation infrastructure. The agency has introduced hybrid passenger ferries, electric buses, inductive charging technology and a fully propane-powered small-bus fleet – all while balancing fiscal responsibility with service

reliability.

In this Executive Q&A, Clauson reflects on his path from driver to director, the evolving role of public transit in Kitsap County's economy, and how sustainability, innovation and regional collaboration are shaping the future of transportation across urban, suburban and rural communities.

### **Please tell our readers a little bit about yourself and your path to becoming Executive Director of Kitsap Transit.**

I started with the newly established Kitsap Transit in 1983 as a driver. In 1986, I was promoted to Service Development Manager, later retitled Service Development Director. During my employment at KT, my responsibilities expanded to include Marketing, Customer Service, Service Planning and Scheduling, Rideshare, and Transportation Demand Management administration. In 2003, after Kitsap Transit purchased the foot ferry



John Clauson,  
Executive Director of Kitsap Transit

“route” between Bremerton and Port Orchard and between Bremerton and Annapolis, my responsibilities expanded yet again, to include the management of this passenger-only ferry service.

When the original Executive Director of Kitsap Transit announced his retirement after nearly 30 years, I was asked by my fellow directors to apply. After a nationwide recruitment and interview process involving members of the Kitsap Transit Board of Commissioners and my peers at the agency, I was chosen to fill the position in 2012.

### **How do you describe Kitsap Transit's role in Kitsap County's economy and day-to-day business activity?**

Kitsap Transit is a major employer in Kitsap County. Since the start of our fast-ferry service in 2017, we have grown substantially into a transit authority with more than 500 employees, most of whom live, shop and

eat here in Kitsap County. We also prioritize supporting local businesses when we can, whether it's catering a special event, printing our brochures, or requesting embroidery on our uniforms.

Just as important is how Kitsap Transit acts as a catalyst for development and growth management. We have partnered with cities and the county to develop park & ride lots in fast-growing areas so that housing and commercial development can work with transit instead of promoting only automobiles, which leads in the long term to traffic congestion. We've seen some exciting transit-oriented development in Bremerton and Poulsbo in recent years.

### **What are Kitsap Transit's top priorities as the region continues to grow and change, and how do those priorities shape your decision-making?**

Kitsap Transit's top priority is to provide safe, reliable and efficient transportation choices that enhance the quality of life in Kitsap County. We want to be responsive, within budget constraints, and serve as much of the transportation needs of our community, including those that are transit-dependent, our senior/disabled community, the younger people that may not have other transportation options available, and certainly the commuters to help reduce congestion on our local roads and highways.

We always strive to learn and understand what the changing travel demands may be for our communities and, to the best of our abilities, we want to make sure our system is flexible to make necessary adjustments to respond to them.

### **How does Kitsap Transit ensure transit solutions meet the needs of diverse communities across urban, suburban, and rural areas, including supporting workforce access for local employers?**

We strive to provide opportunities for not

only the community to communicate with us but for us to reach out and solicit information. We have a rather robust customer comment system for which community members can communicate via phone, email, internet, or comment cards on our vehicles and vessels, submitting comments and suggestions. In addition to that, once a quarter we publicize and I hold virtual community meetings where I will share recent things we are up to and provide equal time for attendees to ask questions and provide input directly. And we frequently conduct surveys to give the community an opportunity to tell us what they need from Kitsap Transit and what they think of our service or proposed capital projects.

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established by the Kitsap Transit Board of Commissioners to provide guidance to the agency's senior management and directors. The CAC serves as (1) a sounding board for proposed policies and plans; (2) a communication link between residents within the service area and Kitsap Transit leadership; and (3) a body that offers recommendations on plans, policies, and procedures to the Board of Commissioners. In addition, the CAC supports and promotes agency accountability. The CAC aims to bring together members who reflect the diverse communities across Kitsap County, including Bainbridge Island, Poulsbo, Kingston, Silverdale, East Bremerton, West Bremerton, Port Orchard, and South Kitsap. The Committee also seeks representation from key community and advocacy groups – such as Olympic College, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and local social service agencies – as well as a wide range of Kitsap Transit riders. This includes users of ACCESS, routed bus service, the Worker/Driver program, local ferries, fast ferries, and vanpool. Currently we have vacancies in representation from Olympic College, PSNS, Kitsap Community Resources, Poulsbo, and riders from our local ferry, vanpool, routed service, and Worker/Driver service.

As far as supporting workforce access for local employers, not only do we provide transportation options through our Worker/Driver and vanpool programs but take many opportunities throughout the year to attend transit fairs and community functions such as the Kitsap County Fair to provide information and solicit input from community members.



### **Sustainability is a key focus of this issue. What does sustainability mean in the context of public transit, and how does Kitsap Transit put it into practice?**

We look at sustainability from multiple perspectives – financial, operations, and environmental sustainability are all critical. We want to make sure the system operates within its financial abilities and constraints. We work diligently with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the State Department of Transportation on grant opportunities to help fund a lot of our capital projects. We are also cognizant of the fact that we don't operate service based on grant dollars. Grant funds are not guaranteed, so we don't want to be in the position of impacting service levels if we are not successful in an application.

We are always striving to be more efficient, which includes bringing in new technology that will 1) be cost effective and 2) improve the quality of service we provide to the community. As an example, we were the first in the Puget Sound to have a hybrid passenger ferry which we put into operation between Bremerton and Port Orchard. This has allowed us to operate that service at a lower cost per hour than an equivalent diesel vessel.

Looking at electric buses is another example of being cost effective in our operation, especially compared to equivalent diesel buses. We have learned that the life of a set of brake shoes is longer on an electric bus than on a diesel bus, primarily because when an operator releases the throttle, the vehicle goes into a regeneration mode which slows it down on its own rather than primarily using the brakes. Also, electric buses aren't subject to things like oil changes, etc. We're seeing that the cost per mile of electric buses is less than that of equivalent diesel buses.



# Executive Q & A

From an operating perspective, we try to be strategic when we introduce new service because we don't want to have to take it away from the community later. We have limited resources for operating bus service over a large area, so we have focused our transit service on urban corridors, where we can deliver service efficiently and conveniently to the greatest number of people and employers. To use a food analogy, we don't want to spread the peanut butter so thin that it seems insignificant.

Finally, our organization takes environmental sustainability seriously. Our bus depots in Bremerton and Poulsbo, as well as our Bremerton ferry dock operations, have been certified as meeting a global standard for environmental management systems (ISO 14001). We have a standing internal team and coordinator that set annual goals for reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, preventing oil and chemical spills and improving how much we recycle. Through this process, we successfully substituted clean biodiesel as the fuel for our diesel buses.

## **Kitsap Transit has made significant investments in electric buses and clean energy infrastructure. What milestones are you most proud of so far?**

In general, I would say the approach we took to bringing in the technology of electric buses. The first electric bus we purchased was bought with local funds, so there were no federal strings attached. We bought it primarily to see if an electric vehicle would work in our environment, given the topography, weather, and other things that have an impact on

electric vehicles. Once we learned we could operate an electric bus, we purchased a second vehicle from a different manufacturer. We then solicited input from our drivers on which one they preferred. Asking for their input helped increase operator acceptance of the new technology.

Another related milestone is the fact that we were one of the first transit agencies in the northwest to incorporate an inductive charging system into one of our transit facilities. In 2024 we opened our Silverdale Transit Center which features four inductive charging pads. These wireless charging pads "top up" the batteries of our electric buses while they're in service, allowing us to operate the buses for longer stretches than if we had to plug them in at our bus depot.

Lastly, there is currently not a US manufacturer that builds small electric buses, like the ones we use in our ACCESS and demand response system. Because of that, we started working on introducing propane conversions into our fleet as small buses came due for replacement. Today, 100 percent of our small bus fleet operates on propane which is less expensive than diesel and gas and is much better for the environment.

## **What challenges come with transitioning to a greener fleet, and how has your team worked to overcome them?**

The first challenge was getting our operators and maintenance staff to accept electric vehicles, both to operate and maintain. This was a relatively easy hurdle to overcome, as we kept them involved in the process. Once the drivers got the hang of the system, it was easy. Training required on the part of our maintenance staff was a little more involved, however, as there are many safety aspects that need to be adhered to when dealing with these high voltage DC current vehicles.

To the issue of training, and on a side note, we have worked with Olympic College on a low voltage training course, hosted by the college, to lay the groundwork for high voltage system training, which we are also collaborating with them on. Staff also works with the West Sound Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) network, providing hands-on low voltage electrical circuit training to all Kitsap schools with STEM programs.

Another challenge was the introduction of the charging infrastructure necessary, be it for plug-in stations or the inductive units, and working with Puget Sound Energy to make

sure we have adequate power at our facilities to charge multiple vehicles at once.

Acceptance in the community has been the easiest part of the transition. The vehicles are quieter, they don't have the exhaust smell that comes with internal combustion vehicles, and there is much support in the community to go to zero-emission vehicles.

## **In what ways has technology or data helped improve operations, service delivery, or rider experience at Kitsap Transit?**

Kitsap Transit has been and continues to work with Clever Devices on new technology for our buses that will provide us with an accurate counting of passengers boarding and alighting at specific locations. We will soon be able to report on the most highly used bus stops, which will assist us when allocating amenities such as shelters. The technology also automates the announcement system for the next stop approaching, making navigation easier for our visually impaired riders. The system also includes an automated vehicle locator (AVL) system that we can use for KTrackr, our real-time map, trip planner, and stop prediction service. The AVL will also provide us with historical data on if, when and where our buses are not able to maintain the schedule so we can make necessary adjustments and produce more accurate schedules that reflect current traffic issues.

Recent improvements in our rider alert system have not only enabled customization of alerts but have enabled things such as service disruptions to be sent out quicker than before. Our newest project involves rolling out our Text for Next Arrival messaging service where riders can text a phone line with their stop number and receive a text with the expected time of arrival of up to three buses within the next hour.

## **Kitsap Transit has been recognized nationally for innovation, including fast ferries and electric infrastructure. How do you foster a culture of innovation within a public agency?**

Part of it is making sure you keep your affected staff involved in the discussion and decision-making process on whatever technology is being researched. We've been able to foster an environment where people are comfortable "pushing the limits" without fear of failure. Along these lines, you need to perform adequate cost/benefit analyses or evaluations of the success/failure of each project.





*Former U.S. Rep. Derek Kilmer visits Kitsap Transit's Charleston Base in Bremerton with Executive Director John Clauson. The facility serves as the agency's primary maintenance hub and has been upgraded with multiple electric-vehicle charging units to support the growing electric bus fleet.*

I also make sure to keep our Board of Commissioners informed and familiar with each step along the way toward the decision to introduce new technology so that they understand it and are supportive of bringing it in.

Another aspect is learning from others. We are a member of a very good national public transit association (American Public Transit Association/APTA) and an equally impressive state organization (Washington State Transit Association/WSTA). Through these organizations, we can learn from the experiences of others and reach out to those that are considering similar projects or concepts, creating a type of "lessons learned" atmosphere. In general, we pay attention to our industry and look at different opportunities for introducing innovation and doing reasonable cost/benefit analysis of the technology.

**How do you evaluate success for Kitsap Transit beyond traditional measures like ridership?**

One of the most common things we use are the positive responses we frequently receive from the community on our service, whether it's providing essential transportation for the car-less and transit dependent community to making sure the system responds as best as it can for their daily transportation needs or a celebration event such as a parade. I'm, of course, referring to the recent Seahawk Super Bowl Championship celebration parade. Throughout the day, I watched our system work and saw and heard positive comments from users, expressing how well our fast ferries performed, the supporting bus service, and just working closely with Washington State Ferries on making things flow as easy as possible. This is a stellar example of community support, acceptance, and success of service delivery.

Of course, we can't ignore the efficiency

*Kitsap Transit's passenger ferry fleet operates on Puget Sound, expanding regional transportation options between Kitsap County and Seattle.*

matrix used that involves ridership, cost per passenger, passengers per hour, and the like. Hard figures help us see how successful we are and help plan for the future while staying within budget and forecasted revenue.

**What excites you most about the future of Kitsap Transit over the next five to 10 years?**

We have a lot of projects that we are striving to complete that will improve service delivery to our communities. One of these projects is the development of a new passenger-only ferry terminal in Seattle. This is critical, as we are currently sharing King County Water Taxi's dock, which is designed for no more than two boats at a time. We have three boats in operation in the morning, and King County has two. The challenge is to find blocks of time where the dock is available. As a result, our schedules are not written based on community needs but on when dock is available in Seattle. By developing a new passenger-only ferry terminal, we can adjust our schedules based on community needs and not dock availability.

Continuing with our Marine Services Department, we are looking at the need to build a new Marine Maintenance facility. This will provide us with the ability to haul our vessels out for US Coast Guard inspections and maintenance without having to wait for an opening in the various shipyards in the Puget Sound.

On the transit side, we are working on building a couple of new park & rides in the community: One on Hwy 305 and Day Road on Bainbridge Island and a larger facility in

South Kitsap on Sidney Road, just north of the intersection with Sedgwick. That facility will provide a large amount of parking for people coming out of the south end of the county that can hop on a bus to help reduce congestion in Gorst. We are always looking for opportunities to improve service delivery, be it restructuring current routes or schedules or experimenting with ways to serve more rural communities. A successful example of this is our BI Ride, Kingston Ride, and SK Ride services. These are commonly referred to as micro-transit, but I like to think of it more in the line of public transit's version of Uber, where users can schedule rides via phone or app.

We are introducing more opportunities for zero-emission vehicles and vessels. We are working with people in the Puget Sound to develop a prototype for an all-electric passenger-only hydrofoil. When the technology is validated with the prototype, it will allow for greater capacity on our Bremerton to Seattle runs and still reduce the impact on beaches, bulkheads, and the environment. On the bus side, we are exploring the potential of bringing hydrogen generation to the community as well as hydrogen fuel cell technology for buses. We are early in the planning stages but are looking at this as another option for a zero-emission approach to service delivery.

**How does Kitsap Transit collaborate with local governments, tribes, and regional partners to advance shared sustainability and transportation goals?**

First, we have staff that work very closely with the planning departments at jurisdictions



*Photo courtesy of Logan Westom*

## Executive Q & A

to make sure our long-range plan is in sync with their comp plan, enabling everyone to head in the same direction. Our Board of Commissioners is made up of all three county commissioners, the mayors of all four cities, an additional member from the Bremerton City Council and an At Large member that is rotated through the three smaller cities. This fact alone ensures we are collectively aware of what the cities and communities are doing, as well as keeping them informed of what we are doing. In addition, we strive to provide the highest level of communication and transparency to the tribes in Kitsap County. I sit on the Board for the Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council along with representatives from the Suquamish Tribe and Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe. We also have many opportunities to communicate with our regional partners: some of our Board members sit on the Puget Sound Regional Council Transportation Policy Board, and Kitsap Transit is the lead planning agency for the Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization. This body works with the various jurisdictions

and tribes in Jefferson County, Clallam County, Mason County, and Kitsap County.

We are also a member of the Washington State Transit Association, made up of all of the other transits in Washington State, we work closely with Washington State Department of Transportation, with the legislature during sessions, and are a member of the American Public Transit Association.

### Who or what inspires your approach to leadership in public service?

I would have to say it started in high school, when I was a member of the local volunteer fire department. This introduced me to the



*Photo courtesy of Logan Westom*  
*Executive Director John Clauson addresses employees during Kitsap Transit's All-Hands Meeting.*

concept of structure, leadership, training, and serving the community. With that, I've always had a general interest in serving my community. In my early involvement, I volunteered with the City of Port Orchard in civil service, later being appointed to city council, where I served with various people over my 40+ years on the council.

In many ways, my desire to be involved in the community comes from wanting to help make it better for my three children and now my four grandchildren. Contributing, even in a small way, to improving our community and protecting our environment for the future continues to motivate me. Setting a positive example for my children and grandchildren has always been at the heart of that commitment.

In terms of transit, being part of this organization since its early days gave me the opportunity to learn from many talented people, with much of the credit going to former Executive Director Richard Hayes. I continue to have tremendous respect for him and learned a great deal from his experience and leadership. I've also been fortunate to work alongside an exceptional team at Kitsap Transit. It has truly been an honor, and their dedication continues to inspire and motivate me. ■

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# Personal Development

## Winning Leaves Clues: Lessons from the Seahawks



The first of a two-part series on Leadership Lessons from the Seattle Seahawks' Super Bowl season

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

### Super Bowl Champs.

While we in the PNW are still basking in the aftermath of a Super Bowl win by the Seattle Seahawks, there's a chance we might be able to take a few leadership lessons from their head coach, Mike MacDonald.

Admittedly, I'm an avid fan, bordering on compulsive. I've been listening to interviews with Coach MacDonald since he was hired two years ago. This season, several themes emerged that made me think about the broader ramifications of leadership at its best.

We should be thanking Mike MacDonald for bringing the Lombardi Trophy back to Seattle after a 12-year absence. We'd also be wise to glean a few leadership insights from him and his team.

### Process Over Results

This concept isn't new to me. I've used it for years with my high school golfers. But I've been impressed with how Coach MacDonald elevated it with his players.

The idea is simple in theory, harder in practice.

It feels natural to chase quantifiable results. In a data-driven world, we're encouraged to measure outcomes. While achieving great results – like winning a Super Bowl – is the

goal, the focus belongs on the process of getting great.

Take *increasing revenue* as an example. It's easy to set a goal of increasing annual revenue by a specific dollar amount or percentage. Measurable, right? But what's the process that produces it?

When you reverse-engineer revenue growth, you ultimately land on daily behaviors. Depending on your industry, that might include attending networking events, joining a referral group, asking for introductions, or consistently creating content.

Those are solid daily activities. But what we learned from the Seahawks is that it's more than simply going through the motions.

Process over results is a mindset. It requires identifying the right behaviors and then fully embracing them. Doing the work can produce good results. Embracing the work with energy and belief builds confidence and produces even better, more rewarding outcomes.

Where in your business could the mindset of process over results be strengthened?

### Alignment

Coach MacDonald, General Manager John Schneider, and team owner Jodi Allen appear to be in lockstep when it comes to player acquisition and team construction. That may sound obvious, but it's not the norm in the NFL.

The reality is that many NFL teams experience dysfunction among that all-important triumvirate of owner, general manager, and head coach. When alignment breaks down, egos surface, patience wears thin, and organizational churn follows.

*Case in point: the Las Vegas Raiders have hired seven head coaches in the past 10 years. The Seahawks are on their seventh coach in 42 years.*

What separates the Seahawks – and a handful of other successful franchises – is clarity of vision. Ownership

defines what the team should look like. They hire a general manager who shares that vision, and then a coach to execute it. The coach is clear about the type and character of players he wants. The GM finds them. In the best scenarios, the owner pays the bills and stays out of the way.

Coach MacDonald has been transparent about how he wants his team and coaching staff built. That clarity appears supported by leadership above him. There seems to be strong

communication, trust, patience, and confidence throughout the organization.

Businesses need similar alignment. Owner, executive leadership, management, and employees must share vision and direction supported by trust and consistent communication.

How aligned is your organization?

**"WE DID NOT CARE..."**

What might become a legendary postgame statement came from Coach MacDonald after winning the NFC Championship over the Los Angeles Rams.

When asked how it felt to overcome division rivals like the 49ers and Rams to reach the Super Bowl, his response was simple:

**"WE DID NOT CARE!"**

That's leadership clarity.

It was never about the opponent. It was about their preparation, their process, their brotherhood, their systems. It didn't matter who lined up across from them. It was about themand the next game.

What about us in our businesses and careers?

Do we overthink the competition?

Do we obsess over what others are doing?

Are we distracted by what's said on social media?

Or do we focus on what we do well – our process and our people?

Next month, we'll examine three more leadership lessons from the Super Bowl champions and their coach. ■





# Budding New Flower Shop in Kingston: Bouquet!

Kingston's downtown is enjoying fresh energy breathed into a floral legacy as Jacquie Day has recently taken over the space which has hosted many beautiful blooms over the years. The space, which prior visitors may remember as Thistle or Flower Box, sports a colorful facelift inside and is the perfect spot to stop in for a bouquet or floral arrangement and a thoughtful, nicely scented gift before catching the ferry!

Jacquie and her partner, who live in Kingston, decided to take over the space from Flower Box because Jacquie's dream was to create a space where people can experience beauty and combine all the things that make us

happy into one place. She has a background in culinary arts, herbalism, photography and of course a deep love for flowers and the natural world. Jacquie is still building out the offerings of her shop with services such as ready-to-go bouquets, flower delivery for all kinds of occasions, including arrangements for businesses catered to their specific needs. Future plans for Bouquet include an in-house espresso bar and cakes which people can enjoy on the year-round outdoor patio (opening in spring 2026).

"The thing I'm most excited about is



providing a place where people feel welcome and want to take a small part of that home with them," says Jacquie. Follow @bouquetkingston on Instagram or Facebook for updates, gorgeous photos of flowers and much more! ■

## News from board

The Greater Kingston Visitor Center has just added part-time staffing to be open more hours- stop by anytime you're waiting for the Kingston ferry! And check our tourism website online to find the latest happenings and events in Kingston: ExploreKingstonWA.com

## Welcome New Members

- Driftwood Real Estate
- ZenBusiness

## Renewing Members

- Place Strategic
- ABE Computer Consultants, LLC
- Northlake Marina
- Kingston Cove Yacht Club
- Medicare Optimized
- North Kitsap School District
- Law Office of Isaac A. Anderson, P.S.
- Eagle Harbor Window Coverings
- Havencraft

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# Real Estate

## Kitsap County – Real Estate, Green Business & Sustainability: How Local Communities Are Driving Smarter Buying and Selling

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



Sustainability has become a defining factor in Kitsap County's real estate market. Across Bremerton, Silverdale, Poulsbo, and Bainbridge Island, buyers are prioritizing energy efficiency, environmental stewardship, and long-term cost savings, while sellers are leveraging green upgrades to stand out in an increasingly informed marketplace. Green business practices are no longer a trend – they are shaping property values and buyer behavior countywide.

Here are the top 10 ways sustainability is influencing real estate in Kitsap County's key communities.

### 1. Energy Efficiency Shapes Buyer Decisions

In Silverdale, where newer residential development is common, homes equipped with heat pumps, high-efficiency windows, and modern insulation consistently attract stronger buyer interest. Lower monthly utility costs are a compelling selling point in today's cautious market.

### 2. Green Certifications Elevate Listing Appeal

On Bainbridge Island, homes with green certifications or documented energy upgrades often command premium attention. Environmentally conscious buyers view these properties as better-built, healthier, and more future-ready.

### 3. Solar Readiness Adds Competitive Advantage

Solar installations and solar-ready infrastructure are increasingly attractive

in Poulsbo, where buyers value long-term energy independence. Even partial preparation – upgraded electrical panels or south-facing roof design – can differentiate a listing.

### 4. Green Building Supports Local Trades

Across Bremerton, revitalization projects are increasingly relying on local green contractors, energy auditors, and environmentally focused remodelers. These businesses help sellers improve efficiency while keeping investment dollars in the local economy.



### 5. Water Stewardship Matters in Rural Areas

In Poulsbo and North Kitsap, where many properties rely on private wells and septic systems, buyers are paying close attention to water-efficient fixtures, updated systems, and responsible land use.

These features reduce long-term ownership risk and add to buyer confidence.

### 6. Eco-Conscious Design Attracts Modern Buyers

Open layouts, natural light, and non-toxic materials are increasingly expected across Kitsap County. In Bainbridge Island and Silverdale, buyers respond positively to homes featuring low-VOC paints, sustainable flooring, and improved indoor air quality.

### 7. Conservation Enhances Long-Term Property Value

Bremerton's investment in shoreline restoration and green spaces helps preserve

the character that draws buyers to the city. Nearby homes benefit from protected views, improved walkability, and enhanced neighborhood appeal.

### 8. Sustainable Infrastructure Influences Location Choices

Buyers are increasingly evaluating neighborhoods based on stormwater management, walkability, and access to parks. In Silverdale, developments that integrate green infrastructure tend to outperform those without it.

### 9. Climate-Resilient Homes Offer Peace of Mind

Homes designed with proper drainage, erosion control, and energy resilience are gaining attention – particularly in waterfront and hillside areas of Bremerton and Bainbridge Island. Buyers see resilience as a form of long-term insurance.

### 10. Sustainability Builds Trust in the Selling Process

Across Kitsap County, sustainability signals thoughtful ownership. Sellers who can document green upgrades often earn stronger buyer trust, smoother negotiations, and faster transactions.

A Greener Market Advantage

In today's real estate climate, sustainability is more than a value statement – it's a market strategy. From Bremerton's revitalization to Bainbridge Island's eco-focused housing culture, green business and sustainable real estate practices are shaping smarter buying and selling decisions.

Kitsap County's future is being built with intention – where environmental responsibility strengthens both community and market resilience. ■



# VISIT Kitsap

## Feeling Ready for Peak Visitor Season

Summer doesn't sneak up on Kitsap, it arrives predictably, every year. What's changed isn't the season. It's the scale. Between 2019 and 2025, Kitsap recorded **20.3 million trips** and **55.3 million visitor days**, with an average stay of **2.7 days**. Roughly **two-thirds of those trips are now out-of-state**, and most visits are **one to two days long**. Visitors are arriving more frequently, staying briefly, and making decisions quickly.

Just as important is *who* those visitors actually are. Kitsap's visitors skew older, established, and intentional:

- **32.7% are ages 45-64**
- **52.6% have household incomes over \$75,000**
- **Nearly half are households of one or two people**

This is a visitor who values clarity, ease, and quality over flash. They're not looking to be sold to, they're looking to be reassured. Clear information, simple choices, and a sense that your business has things figured out go a long way.

If your messaging answers practical questions clearly, you're already ahead.

This isn't about doing more marketing. It's about having the right fundamentals in place so your business feels steady, not stretched, when peak season arrives.

### A Simple 90-Day Marketing Plan (Not a Perfect One)

Most businesses don't need more ideas. They need fewer decisions. The most effective plans start with three choices:

- **One audience** (day trippers, weekend visitors, event-driven travelers)
- **One goal** (bookings, foot traffic, inquiries)
- **One clear message** you can repeat for 90 days

Data shows that **over 70% of visits are one day** across Kitsap County. That means visitors are deciding quickly. A simple, consistent message beats a rotating set

of promotions every time. Small changes matter:

- "Perfect after the ferry"
  - "Worth the drive"
  - "Easy stop before heading back"
  - Midweek promotions
  - Weather-based suggestions
  - "If you're here on a Tuesday..." messaging
- You don't need to turn a day trip into a weeklong stay. Turning it into one extra stop is often enough.

To promote why visitors should visit your business, here's realistic weekly rhythm:

- One Google update
- One social post
- One mention of an offer, event, or partner

### Make Google and Your Website Your Front Door

Most visitors don't start on your website. They start on their phone.

Top Kitsap feeder markets include Portland, Spokane, Bellingham, Vancouver (WA) and growing out-of-state cities like San Diego, Las Vegas, and Phoenix. These visitors don't know your shortcuts, seasonal hours, or parking rules.

Visibility readiness looks like:

- Accurate Google Business Profile
- Current photos
- Correct hours
- Clear categories
- Recent review responses

These visitors don't know your shortcuts, your parking quirks, or your seasonal hours. Businesses that feel "easy" win their trust faster.

### Conversions: Make It Easy to Say Yes

When traffic increases, clarity matters more than creativity.

In under 10 seconds, visitors are asking:

- Can I get here?
- Are you open?
- How do I book or buy?
- Is this for me?

Small fixes have outsized impact:

- Booking buttons above the fold
- A simple "Getting Here" section
- Clear calls to action

- Mobile-friendly layouts

You don't need a redesign. You need fewer obstacles.

### Collaboration: Help Visitors Move Through Kitsap

Visitors don't experience Kitsap in silos. They move in loops: lodging → dining → retail → experiences → transportation. Businesses that collaborate help visitors stay longer and feel more confident without extra ad spend.

Effective collaborations are simple (*Ballast Book Co. and Cups Espresso in downtown Bremerton is a helpful example*):

- Referral mentions
- Bundled offers
- "Show this receipt" perks
- Shared recommendations
- Leverage local events such as Bremerton Bridge Blast or Bainbridge Island's "Grand Old Fourth"

Given that most trips are short, collaboration is often what turns a single stop into multiple.

### The Readiness Test

Businesses that feel prepared going into summer can answer "yes" to most of these:

- I have a 90-day plan I can actually follow
- I'm easy to find online
- My website makes it easy to say yes
- I collaborate with at least one other business

If not, the goal isn't to fix everything. It's to choose one action in each category over the next 30 days.

### Final Thought

Peak season doesn't reward louder marketing. It rewards clearer systems.

Visitors are coming. They're deciding quickly. And they're looking for businesses that feel easy, welcoming, and confident.

Readiness isn't about doing more, it's about doing what matters, on purpose. It's time to build in the quiet, while it still is, to benefit in the busy. **Start today.** ■

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## Feature

# Turning Waste into Climate Action

### How Green Mountain Technologies Scales Composting from Kitsap to the World

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Every year, millions of tons of food waste in the United States rot in landfills, releasing methane – a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide in the short term. It's an invisible climate problem, buried beneath layers of trash. But in Kitsap County, a small family-run company is quietly helping to reverse that equation at massive scale.

Through the systems engineered by Green Mountain Technologies (GMT), an estimated 2.5 million tons of food waste can be composted annually instead of landfilled. That diversion represents roughly 1.25 million tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions avoided each year. In climate terms, that's not symbolic progress – it's infrastructure-level impact.

Compost does more than reduce emissions. It builds soil that holds water more efficiently, reduces plant disease, restores microbial life and even helps pull carbon back into the ground. By designing the technology that makes large-scale composting possible,



*Aerial view of the Blossom Valley Organics North facility in California's Central Valley, designed and equipped by GMT and considered one of the largest food-waste composting operations in North America.*



*Orion Black-Brown, president of GMT*

GMT is contributing to a regenerative cycle: waste becomes soil, soil grows food, and food nourishes communities – all while shrinking the carbon footprint of the system.

"We're a company that helps people compost by bringing the infrastructure side," said Orion Black-Brown, president of GMT. "Our mission is to help people create compost by driving technology and innovation."

When most people hear the word "composting," they picture a backyard bin or a small countertop container. GMT operates at an entirely different scale: university campuses, municipalities, regional waste authorities and large commercial facilities. From Bainbridge Island to California's Central Valley – and even dense urban environments like Manhattan – the company designs and engineers the systems that make large-scale

composting possible.

"We're talking university scale and bigger," Black-Brown said. "All the food waste from a university or community goes to a centralized location, and we provide the infrastructure that makes that work."

GMT represents something essential but often unseen: the infrastructure that makes climate solutions practical.

### From Vermont Roots to Bainbridge Island

GMT's story began in 1992 in Vermont, where Black-Brown's father founded the company and named it for the state's iconic Green Mountains. In 2000, the family relocated to the Pacific Northwest.

"My mom's family is fifth or sixth generation Bainbridge Island," Black-Brown said. "We've been on Bainbridge for a really long time, and she wanted to be closer to her family. So we moved, and since then the company has been based there."

For years, GMT was literally headquartered out of his parents' home.

"For a long time we were at my parents' house, and my dad was trying to retire – and failing miserably while the business was still there," he said with a laugh.

Today, the company is in a transition phase, with fabrication operations in Suquamish and some office functions still tied to Bainbridge Island. Despite its small size, GMT's reach is substantial.

Locally, its systems are integrated into sites such as Bloedel Reserve and IslandWood on Bainbridge, Olympic Organics (formerly EMU Topsoil), which handles much of Kitsap County's curbside organic waste; a facility in Shelton operated by Brady Trucking; and long-running sites in Pierce County and Tacoma, including the Compost Factory and Purdy Compost.

Beyond Washington, GMT has installed systems across the country, including what Black-Brown believes is the largest food-waste composting facility in North America – possibly the



*A GMT team member works directly with a client, reflecting the company's hands-on approach to designing and supporting custom composting systems.*

world – in California's Central Valley, processing significant volumes of organic waste from the Bay Area.

For a company that grew out of a family home, that global footprint is striking.

### Why Food Waste Is a Climate Issue

GMT's work focuses overwhelmingly on food waste – the most difficult and consequential material in the composting world.

"Food waste is the hardest thing to compost," Black-Brown said. "It comes with the most contamination – especially plastic – and it's really stinky. It can have the most negative environmental impact, but also the highest positive environmental impact if we handle it correctly."

When food scraps end up

in landfills, they decompose anaerobically – without oxygen – producing methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

"Methane is one of the biggest contributors to climate change," he said. "When food waste goes into a landfill, that's kind of worst-case scenario."

Diverting that same food waste into a properly designed composting system dramatically changes the climate math.

"If you divert roughly one ton of food waste from the landfill to a well-managed composting facility, that's about half a ton of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent emissions that you don't put into the atmosphere," Black-Brown explained.

And emissions reduction is only part of the story. Compost improves soil health, increases water retention and boosts nutrient density in food.

"When you put compost in the soil, you increase fungal growth, and as those fungi grow, they sequester CO<sub>2</sub>," Black-Brown said. "We also know compost helps reduce plant disease and brings more nutrients into our food. That's the difference between a homegrown tomato and one that tastes like nothing."

Composting, in other words, is not just waste management – it is regenerative agriculture and climate mitigation rolled into one.

## Building the Invisible Infrastructure

What GMT provides isn't a retail product. It is infrastructure – deeply integrated into concrete pads, drainage systems and control panels.

Composting at scale is highly regulated, particularly when food waste is involved. Facilities handling it are treated like solid waste processing sites, subject to extensive permitting, environmental review and operational standards.

"It's not like you can just build a big composting facility in your backyard and start taking food waste," Black-Brown said. "You're going through a lot of the same permitting process you'd see for a landfill or transfer station."

GMT's core technology often centers on aerated static pile (ASP) composting. To visualize it, Black-Brown uses a surprisingly accessible metaphor.

"We build what are basically big air-hockey tables," he said. "Composting needs air. If it's aerobic, you get compost. If it's anaerobic, you get methane and other problems. So we embed pipes and aeration into concrete pads and integrate that into the site design."

Airflow is controlled beneath compost piles, maintaining oxygen levels and temperatures that encourage beneficial microbes while minimizing odors and methane emissions. Sensors, blowers and monitoring systems help operators manage the biological process with precision.

"You kind of get one chance to build this right," Black-Brown said. "A lot of this is embedded in concrete. If you mis-design it, it's incredibly expensive to fix."

Operational efficiency matters as much as environmental performance.

"For a typical composting facility, about 75% of the pro forma is operations costs," he said. "You're running big grinders,



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loaders and other machinery. If the site isn't laid out properly, you end up running that equipment a lot more – burning more diesel and spending more money."

Design affects not only cost but community acceptance.

"Odor is the number one way big facilities get shut down," Black-Brown said. "Those odors are basically VOC emissions that can travel for miles. If you don't manage the process properly – air, moisture, stormwater – you can run into huge regulatory and community issues."

Good engineering, in this industry, is also good neighbor policy.

## Making Composting Accessible

While GMT has completed large municipal projects, Black-Brown emphasizes that the company is mission-driven.

"What's a little bit unique about us is that we're mission-motivated," he said. "Most companies in the space have a product and a niche, and they just sell there. We're focused on the full spectrum because we want everyone to have composting infrastructure."

For small operators, the barrier is often regulatory and financial. Permitting a food-waste composting site in states like Washington or California can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"That's a huge barrier to entry for someone who just wants to start composting at a smaller scale," he said.

To help bridge that gap, GMT developed Earth Flow, a retrofitted shipping container system that functions as a self-contained composting vessel with built-in aeration and leachate capture.

"There's an Earth Flow in downtown Manhattan composting food waste," Black-Brown said. "You're not going to have odor issues in that kind of setup."

The goal is flexibility: solutions scaled to context, rather than one-size-fits-all.

## Growing a Green Business in Suquamish

Behind GMT's climate metrics is a growing local workforce. The move into a fabrication shop in Suquamish allowed the company to expand its production team from four to seven employees, with plans to double space as neighboring units become available.

"At that point, we'll have to hire more people," Black-Brown said. "We're growing and building out that side of the business."

Bringing more manufacturing in-house allows for continuous improvement.

"Basically every single time we ship a system, we learn what we could have done better and implement that into the next design," he said. "We've been doing that for 30 years."

For a Kitsap-based company, that blend of local job creation and global environmental impact reflects the heart of



**Designated processing zones at the Brady Trucking compost facility in Shelton show how GMT layouts streamline material flow and reduce operational costs.**

green business: solving systemic problems while strengthening community.

## Closing the Loop

For Black-Brown, composting is ultimately philosophical as much as technical.

"Composting sits at the part of the loop people don't want to look at – the death-to-life part," he said. "As our population grows and we need more circularity to sustain humanity, composting is a very important piece of that puzzle."

From a resident's perspective, composting may feel simple – rolling a green bin to the curb and enjoying a trash can that "doesn't smell horrible," as he puts it. Behind that simplicity lies engineering, permitting, regulatory navigation and innovation – much of it shaped in Kitsap County.

"We can't just keep taking our waste and putting it into a landfill and think we're going to survive on this earth as a species," Black-

Brown said. "Eventually all our resources end up there. We need to create circles – and that's what composting is. It's just doing what nature has always done to sustain itself, but at a scale that matches how we live now."

For Green Mountain Technologies, that means designing the unseen systems that turn waste into soil, methane into avoided emissions and local manufacturing into global climate impact – one facility, one community and one ton at a time. ■



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## Feature

# Growing Green in Kitsap

## How WSU Extension Is Cultivating a Resilient Local Food Economy

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

In a county better known for shipyards and ferry routes than for farmland, agriculture in Kitsap County is both intimate and essential. Small-acreage farms dot rural roads from Poulsbo to Port Orchard. Farm stands operate on the honor system. Farmers markets double as gathering places. Behind much of the quiet coordination that helps those farms survive – and thrive – is Washington State University Kitsap Extension's Farming & Food Systems Program.

For Interim Director Jess Sappington, the mission is grounded in both practicality and community.

"In Kitsap County, WSU Extension's Farming & Food Systems Program works alongside farmers, community partners, and residents to support local agriculture, improve access to healthy local food, and strengthen the county's food system," Sappington said. "Grounded in WSU Extension's broader mission of community education, the program translates university research into practical, locally driven learning opportunities that help individuals and communities thrive."

That translation – from research to real-world application – defines what green business looks like in Kitsap's agricultural landscape. Sustainability here is not abstract. It is soil health plans, diversified revenue streams and farmers balancing stewardship with survival.

### A Green Business Model Rooted in Balance

When asked what "green business" means in local food systems, Sappington speaks about balance.

"When I think about a 'green business' in agriculture and local food systems, I really think about balance," she said. "It's about caring for the land - soil, water, ecosystems - while still running a business that can actually support people and last over time."

In Kitsap County, many farms are small, diversified and deeply place-based. They keep food dollars circulating locally and make decisions with long-term resilience in mind.

"In our work around Kitsap County, the program has worked with a lot of small-acreage farmers who really live this out," she said. "They're deeply connected to their land and their community. They focus on things like building healthy soil, reducing waste, and making choices that support long-term resilience, not just short-term gains. At the same time, they're flexible and creative - diversifying income, adapting to change, and making sure farming can remain a viable livelihood. These are very place-based businesses. They keep food dollars local, engage directly with their neighbors, and think about sustainability not just for today, but for the next generation too."

That balance between ecology and economics shapes the program's work.

### Practical Support for Sustainable Profitability

Helping farms operate sustainably is only half the equation. Financial viability is equally critical.

"The program tries to help farmers and food producers by meeting them where they're at and giving them practical, research-based



Photos courtesy of WSU Kitsap Extension

*Visitors explore a participating farm during the annual Kitsap Farm Tour, where agritourism operators open their gates to showcase local agriculture and connect directly with the community.*

support they can actually use," Sappington said. "Here in Kitsap County, that looks like hands-on education and one-on-one technical assistance through WSU Extension's Regional Small Farms work. Farmers get help thinking through production practices, land stewardship, and business planning in a way that fits their operation, whether they're just starting out or looking to grow more sustainably."

Sustainability, she emphasized, must include economic durability.

"At the same time, the program emphasizes supporting the financial viability of farms," she said. "That means helping farms access and strengthen markets - things like farmers markets, farm stands, agritourism, and food access programs - so they can reach more customers and build more reliable income streams. Sustainability isn't just about the land; it's also about making sure farms can stay in business long term."

One example is the Kitsap Agritourism Coalition, a network of farm businesses that incorporate public-facing experiences – tours, events and on-farm education – to diversify income and deepen community ties.

"What's been really exciting to see is how the coalition has grown into a strong peer

network," Sappington said. "Farmers are sharing resources, learning from each other, and working together to solve common challenges."

That collaboration led to the Annual Kitsap Farm Tour, now entering its fourth year and held the second weekend of August. The event invites residents onto working farms to meet farmers and see firsthand how local agriculture operates.

"The tour is a great way to showcase what these agritourism farms have to offer, while also giving the public a chance to visit farms, meet farmers, and learn why local agriculture matters," Sappington said. "It supports farm businesses directly, but it also supports the bigger goal of outreach and education, helping people understand the value of local farms and why supporting them is so important to a healthy, resilient food system."

### Soil, Water and Science in Action

Sustainability often begins underground. Through its Regional Small Farms program serving Clallam, Jefferson and Kitsap counties, Extension provides workshops, farm walks and individualized technical assistance.

"In our work with farmers across Kitsap County, we frequently focus on soil health,



*Kitsap Farm Mentor interns participate in an Integrated Pest Management class at the Kitsap Conservation District, led by Farm Mentors and WSU Regional IPM Specialist Laurel Moulton.*

water quality protection, integrated pest management, and thoughtful land use, alongside business practices such as market diversification, food safety, and direct-to-consumer sales," Sappington said.

An integrated pest management specialist works directly with farms to address complex pest issues while keeping sustainability at the forefront.

"All of this is about meeting farmers where they are and helping them find solutions that work for their land, their businesses, and their communities," she said.

As climate variability increases, science-based support becomes even more important.

"A big way the program helps local

producers is by connecting them directly with practical, science-based information they can actually use," Sappington said. "Through the larger University system, we're able to bring the latest research straight to the community - whether that's hosting workshops, farm walks, or hands-on learning opportunities where farmers can hear directly from WSU faculty, specialists, and other researchers. Everything is really focused on local conditions, and the real challenges producers are facing right now."

Extension's model is collaborative rather than top-down.

"Just as important, though, is the role farmers themselves play," she said. "Many producers in our community are already actively responding to climate and environmental changes on their land. They take what they learn through Extension and adapt it to fit their own farms, whether that means trying new practices, building more resilient systems, or sharing what's working with neighbors. Extension helps support that two-way exchange, where research informs what happens on the ground, and farmers' experiences help shape how those ideas are refined and applied locally."

### Building the Next Generation

Long-term sustainability depends on who

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"Honestly, the heart of our work is making sure small and family-run farms have the information and resources that they need to stay successful and really feel supported in every stage of their farming journey," Sappington said.

The Kitsap Farm Mentor Program pairs established farmers with interns working on their farms while participating in shared classes led by the mentors.

"This group-learning model does more than just boost each intern's technical knowledge; it also creates a unique peer network," Sappington said. "Instead of being siloed on their individual farms all season, interns get to connect, share experiences, and learn alongside one another. That combination of real-world education and community-building helps new and beginning farmers build confidence and see a clearer, more supported pathway into farming as a career. And because the mentors are all local farmers, the knowledge and experience stays rooted right here in the community"

Access to land is equally important. Through facilitating the Kitsap Farmland Preservation Coalition, Extension supports efforts to protect farmland and expand access for new producers.

"When you step back and look at all these efforts together, you can really see how they create a full ecosystem of support for our local farms," Sappington said. "We're helping new farmers get started with hands-on education, structured learning opportunities, and technical assistance that gives them a solid foundation. At the same time, we're supporting existing farmers with continued education, resources, and one-on-one technical assistance as they grow their operations and expand their markets."

## Strengthening the Local Food Economy

A resilient food system requires strong markets. Extension supports farmers markets, direct-to-consumer sales and online platforms connecting producers and buyers.

In 2015, Extension received a USDA Local Food Promotion Grant to launch Kitsap Fresh, a year-round online farmers market. What began as an Extension-supported effort has since evolved into a farmer-led cooperative, expanding market access while making it easier for residents to purchase locally grown goods.

Another example is Kitsap Farmers Fighting Hunger, a partnership between Extension, the Kitsap Conservation District and local farms.

"One recent example of the Farming & Food Systems program's impact is the launch of Kitsap Farmers Fighting Hunger, a partnership between WSU Kitsap Extension, Kitsap Conservation District, and local farmers that responds to rising food insecurity while directly supporting farm viability," Sappington said. "Created in response to the loss of state and federal funding, the initiative uses community donations to purchase fresh, locally grown food directly from Kitsap farms for distribution to area food banks. This model ensures farmers are fairly paid and have a reliable market, while neighbors in need gain access to high-quality, nutritious food. By keeping food dollars local, reducing waste, and strengthening relationships between farmers and hunger-relief organizations, the project demonstrates how collaborative, locally driven solutions can deliver both economic and environmental benefits for the community."

The approach is simple but strategic: pay farmers fairly, supply food banks with fresh produce and keep food dollars local.

## A Community-Based Approach

The Farming & Food Systems Program is one of several community-based initiatives under

WSU Kitsap Extension, alongside 4-H Youth Development, the Master Gardener Program and the Water Stewardship Program.

"Many community members are often surprised by how much WSU Kitsap Extension offers locally," Sappington said. "Extension works in all 39 counties across Washington State and with our tribal partners. While programs may look different from county to county, that flexibility is intentional - Extension is designed to respond directly to the unique needs of each community"

Local government support makes that responsiveness possible.

"In Kitsap County, this work is made possible through strong support from our local county government, including investment in programming and meaningful partnerships across departments and agencies," Sappington said. "Without that support, our community, and our farmers and food producers, would not have access to these services. We are truly grateful for the county's continued partnership and commitment to community-based education in Kitsap."

## Growing a Resilient Future

The Farming & Food Systems Program illustrates that environmental stewardship, economic resilience and community health are interconnected.

By combining research-based education, individualized technical assistance, mentorship, market development and coalition-building, the program is cultivating a food system that is locally rooted and built for the long term.

In a county where farms are often measured in single digits of acreage, sustainability is less about scale and more about connection - to land, to neighbors and to the next generation. And through that connection, green business in Kitsap County is not just an idea. It is growing in fields, farm stands and farmers markets across the region. ■

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