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A Growing Marine Business Built on Trust, Skill and Community

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Gastro Pup Brings Community-Focused Pet Care to Downtown Bremerton

Gastro Pup has become a downtown Bremerton destination by combining premium pet nutrition, personalized service and a strong sense of community. Founded by Corri Langlois, the independent shop focuses on high-quality products, expert guidance and building lasting relationships with pet owners while giving back through local partnerships and donations.

Holy Water A Heavenly Lounge

How a historic Port Orchard church became a community gathering place

Holy Water, A Heavenly Lounge has transformed a historic Port Orchard church into one of Kitsap's most distinctive gathering places. Owned by Suanne Martin-Smith and her family, the business blends handcrafted food and cocktails with a welcoming, community-first atmosphere built on inclusion, creativity and connection.

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Kindness is not a small thing

For ward
THINKING

Kindness is often treated as something optional. A personal trait. A nice gesture. A matter of personality. It is easy to see it as secondary to more serious qualities like strength, intelligence or determination. In public life especially, kindness can be dismissed as softness, something that belongs on the margins rather than at the center.

That view misses something important.

Kindness is not a small thing.

It shapes how people experience one another. It influences how communities function. It affects not only the person receiving it, but also the person offering it.

There is a quiet truth in that.

The way we treat others does not stay confined to them. It works back on us. A person who approaches others with patience and generosity tends to carry those qualities inward as well. A person who operates with constant harshness often lives inside that same environment.

Kindness is not just outward behavior. It is also internal posture.

That connection becomes more visible in how we speak.

Words are easy to overlook. They are quick, often unplanned and easily dismissed. But they carry weight. A thoughtful response can calm a tense situation. A careless one can escalate it instantly. Tone matters. Timing matters. The difference between a measured response and a sharp one can determine whether a conversation moves forward or breaks down.

In many situations, the simplest form of kindness is restraint.

Not saying the first thing that comes to mind. Not assuming the worst. Not escalating when something could be de-escalated.

That kind of discipline does not draw attention. It does, however, change outcomes.

Kindness also shows up in how we treat those with less influence.

Communities are often judged by how they respond to people who have fewer resources, fewer connections or less ability to advocate for themselves. It is easy to treat those individuals as peripheral. It takes intention to recognize their dignity and respond with care.

But that response has a way of shaping the entire community.

When people know they will be treated fairly and with respect, even in difficult circumstances, trust grows. When they expect to be overlooked or dismissed, trust erodes.

Kindness, in that sense, is not sentimental. It is structural.

It builds stability.

It also has a way of extending beyond immediate circles.

Offering generosity to someone who cannot repay it may seem like a one-sided act. In reality, it reinforces something larger. It sets a standard. It creates an environment where people are more likely to treat one another the same way. Over time, those patterns become culture.

And culture determines whether a community feels cohesive or fractured.

Perhaps the most challenging form of kindness is directed toward those we disagree with.

It is easy to be patient with people who see things the same way. It is harder to extend that same posture to someone who challenges our views or frustrates our expectations. But those moments are often where kindness matters most.

Responding without hostility. Listening without immediately preparing a rebuttal. Choosing not to turn disagreement into personal conflict.

Those choices do not eliminate differences.

They do make it possible to live and work alongside them.

Kindness, at its core, is not about avoiding hard truths or difficult



conversations. It is about how those truths are delivered and how those conversations are carried out.

It is a form of strength.

It requires awareness. It requires control. It requires a willingness to consider the impact of our actions and words before we deliver them.

In a time when sharpness is often rewarded and reaction is immediate, kindness can feel out of place.

It is not.

It remains one of the most practical ways to improve the quality of daily life, both individually and collectively.

Communities do not become stronger through constant tension. They become stronger through consistent respect.

And that begins with something that is simple, but not always easy:

Choosing to treat people well, even when it would be easier not to. ■

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9 Locations to Serve You in Kitsap

From in-shop rebuilds to dockside diagnostics, Salty Boys provides full-service marine repair tailored to each vessel's needs.

Photos Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio



Salty Boys Boat Works

A Growing Marine Business Built on Trust, Skill and Community

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Salty Boys Boat Works isn't just another marine repair outfit – it's a rapidly growing, family-run business that has carved out a reputation across Puget Sound for reliability, technical skill and a straightforward approach that customers say can be hard to find.

From mobile service calls stretching from Olympia to Port Townsend to complex in-shop rebuilds, the Bremerton-based company has built its name on keeping boats running – and their owners confident on the water.

"Mostly what we've heard from customers is that it's hard to find an honest shop and my big philosophy is always to treat people fairly," owner Rick Willhite said.

That reputation didn't come overnight. It was built through a mix of experience, timing and a willingness to take a risk when circumstances forced a career shift.

From Layoff to Launch

Salty Boys traces its roots to 2019, when Rick

was working as a lead technician for Toyota Lift.

"They let go of all of their upper paid people due to COVID before the incentives kicked in," he said. "I think they fired or laid off four of us all together at once."

The layoff could have been a setback. Instead, it became a turning point.

That same day, friends at a yacht club gave him an idea.

"They're like, 'Oh, well, great. Now you have time to work on our boat,'" he said.

Rick began taking on marine repair jobs on his own, building a client base organically. By 2021, he had filed for a business license and formally launched what would become Salty Boys Boat Works.

Early work centered around a yacht club on the Washington side of the Columbia River. Demand was steady – but seasonal.

"There were slow periods in the winter," he said. "Nobody likes to boat in the rain."

The real shift came after he and his wife, Mary, bought a sailboat in Tacoma. Rick



Rick Willhite, founder of Salty Boys Boat Works, built the business on experience, resilience and a commitment to honest service.

wore his work shirts around the marina, and conversations with other boat owners quickly turned into new jobs.

"Business started growing and eventually far outpaced Portland," Rick said. "That's how we ended up in the Puget Sound."

Growth, Setbacks and a Move North

The company began hiring in 2022, but growth came with challenges.

"We went through some rough patches, some growing experiences," Rick said.

At the same time, the Portland side of the business began to falter.

"When I moved up here to grow the business, my partner down there at the time didn't continue with the advertising, and so business really fell off, and we ended up closing that office," he said.

About a year and a half ago, the Portland operation shut down completely, leaving Salty Boys fully focused on Kitsap County and the surrounding region.

For a time, the business operated entirely as a mobile service. That changed in the summer of 2024, when the Willhites secured a shop space in Port Orchard. The addition allowed them to work on smaller vessels and qualify as dealers for brands like Yanmar, Nanni and Cox diesel outboards.

Eventually, they landed in Bremerton, where the business continues to grow.

When they first walked into their current space, it needed serious work.

"The building hadn't been painted in 20 or 30 years," Rick said. "There were so many cars out front you couldn't pull in. There were 14 cars inside the shop. You couldn't walk through there – you'd have to scoot sideways between everything. There was no drywall in this building,

Rick and Mary Willhite with team members Brylie Ellis, Jamie Wright, Cameron Hamilton and Elliot Erickson – the crew behind Salty Boys' growing reputation.



Salty Boys Boat Works carries Yanmar products, supporting its focus on diesel engines and reliable marine performance.

Mary, who recently became an official partner in the business, has long played a central role behind the scenes.

"Kind of the way most LLCs are run, or at least couple-owned businesses, the wife is always doing paperwork and handling customers and making sure the taxes are in order and the funds are there, and she's been doing it without recognition," Rick said.

With a background in accounting, Mary manages payroll, taxes, scheduling and day-to-day operations.

"I want people to be able to give life to their boats and make sure that they continue to run," Mary said. "That they're able to go out and use them and have a safe time on the water, not have to worry about getting out there, getting stranded. Peace of mind."

Building the Right Team

As the business has grown, so has the team. Today, Salty Boys includes a lead technician, multiple technicians and front-office support.

Retention has become just as important as hiring.

"We weren't able to supply healthcare. We have now grown to the point that we can, which I'm very happy about," Rick said.

The company now offers paid time off, training opportunities and internships, while focusing on creating a workplace where employees feel valued.

"I think the biggest thing is that they feel valued in what they do, and that they're making a difference," he said.

A Full-Service Operation

Salty Boys operates as a full-service marine shop with a primary focus on diesel engines and retrofits, along with electrical systems. Much of the work is still mobile, with crews traveling daily across the region.

Each job begins with a detailed intake process, followed by an on-site consultation.

"We found that we have to charge a two-hour minimum to make up for the rising cost



Feature

of everything," Rick said, pointing to fuel, insurance and vehicle expenses.

From there, jobs are scheduled about a week and a half out, with technicians meeting each morning before heading to marinas and docks throughout Puget Sound.

Since they offer an emergency service Occasionally, the work goes far beyond Washington.

"Our most notable one is we flew to Sitka, Alaska, for a head gasket job on a sailboat because there was no one that could do it," Rick said. "There was a transit crew, captain and crew sitting there waiting to leave, and

the boat was inoperable. So we flew up there and got them going within a week."

Problem-Solving at the Core

One recent project highlights the kind of challenges the team takes on.

A hybrid sailboat needed to be converted to a new 30-horsepower Yanmar engine. What seemed straightforward quickly became complicated when they discovered the fuel tank also served as ballast.

"For whatever reason, a genius engineer decided putting the fuel tank underneath the engine was a great idea and filling it with lead for ballast," Rick said.

The tank extended into the keel and was encapsulated in epoxy, making removal impractical.

"Kind of had to switch gears and redesign the tank ourselves," he said.

The team fabricated new components and rebuilt the system in-house, working toward a tight deadline.

It's that kind of work that keeps Rick engaged.

"Fixing something that's broken, being able to add life to something – especially in today's culture, where we just throw things away when they're broken – it's nice to be able to work on stuff that's 50 years old and give it a new life," he said. "Put a new engine in that boat and bring it into the 21st century with fuel injection and all that. That's definitely where things are cool."

Protecting More Than Boats

Beyond repairs, Salty Boys has taken on a quieter role in environmental response.

The company has assisted with fuel and diesel spill containment, working alongside cleanup crews and the state Department of Ecology.

"Directly due to our response for free, we saved probably 1,000 gallons of diesel from going into the surrounding area," Rick said of one incident.

They've also introduced a monthly service

(Top) Brylie Ellis greets customers, schedules jobs and keeps the front office running – often with her puppy close by. (Middle) Co-owner Mary Willhite manages the business side of Salty Boys, from payroll to scheduling, helping keep operations on course. (Bottom) Owner Rick Willhite at work in the shop, where hands-on problem-solving and diesel expertise drive Salty Boys Boat Works' daily operations.



Salty Boys technicians tackle marine repairs across Puget Sound, bringing mobile service directly to boat owners from Olympia to Port Townsend.

program aimed at helping boat owners stay ahead of maintenance costs.

Rooted in Community

Off the water, the Willhites are invested in their community.

They've supported North Kitsap High School athletics, sponsored youth baseball and provided equipment and clothing for families in need. Rick has also volunteered with a ROTC sailing program and participated in cleanup efforts.

Those efforts reflect the same philosophy that guides the business: take care of people, and the rest follows.

Looking Ahead

As Salty Boys continues to grow, the focus is on expanding capabilities while maintaining the personal approach that built its reputation.

"Expanding our footprint so that we can accommodate more customers, a little more streamlined, and growing our staff, employee retention," Rick said.

They're also looking to bring more work in-house, including rebuilding specialized components like velvet drive transmissions.

Through it all, the foundation remains the same.

"One of my biggest pet peeves is, you know, nobody's perfect," he said. "You're never gonna do a perfect job. We can strive to always do our best, but it's fixing mistakes when they happen, and owning up to them"

That philosophy is what truly sets them apart.

In a region defined by its waterways, Salty Boys Boat Works has found its place – not just as a service provider, but as a trusted partner helping keep both boats and the people who rely on them moving forward. ■



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Human Resources

Built by People

A New Era of Leadership in the Trades

By Julie Piazza | SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights

Every ship that clears the harbor, every building that rises from the skyline, and every component that rolls off a production line carries the mark of someone who showed up, applied their skill, and believed their work mattered.

The trades have always been built on human labor and hard-earned expertise. The opportunity now is to build organizations worthy of the people who power them.

Manufacturing, maritime, and construction are among the most essential industries in the world. They shape the physical environment, keep supply chains moving, and support entire economies.

For too long, the people doing this work have been underinvested in. That pattern is changing, and the leaders who act on it today will shape what the next generation of the trades looks like.

People Are the Competitive Advantage

The best equipment in the world is useless without skilled hands to run it. The most aggressive project schedule succeeds only with a crew committed to seeing it through.

In the trades, the difference between companies that thrive and those that struggle usually comes down to one thing: how well they invest in their people.

A shipyard crew, a framing crew, or a fabrication cell is not just a group of workers collecting a paycheck. They are built through years of shared experience, tight deadlines, and work that has to be right the first time.

Trust is earned on the job. Skills are proven under pressure. When those teams are backed by strong leadership, the impact is clear. Job sites are safer, work moves faster and cleaner, and the reputation becomes strong enough that people choose it over other shops.

The biggest return on that investment shows up at the frontline supervisor level. Teaching someone to weld, wire, or machine took years of practice and discipline. Teaching them how to coach, listen, and develop others multiplies that skill across the entire crew.

A New Generation Ready to Rise

The workers coming into the trades today are not less committed than those who came before them. They are committed in different ways. They want clarity about where they are headed. They want a voice in safety decisions. They want respect as people, not just labor. These are reasonable expectations and the conditions under which people do their best work.

The trades are well positioned to deliver this. Mentorship, pride in craft, and loyalty to the crew have always been part of the culture. When an electrician, mechanic, or operator feels seen and supported, they show up more focused and more engaged.

In environments where precision can be the difference between a clean shift and an injury, that difference matters enormously.

Mental health, belonging, and psychological safety are not about lowering standards. They are about

creating the conditions where high standards can be met consistently.

What the Best Are Already Doing

Some organizations are already proving what works. Onboarding sets expectations for culture, safety, and accountability from day one. Supervisors receive ongoing development, not one-time training. Feedback is taken seriously, especially from the people closest to the work, who often have the clearest view of what needs to improve. These leaders talk openly about fatigue, stress, and burnout. They understand that resilient crews are built through support, not through grinding people down.

None of this requires abandoning what makes the trades great. Hard work, pride in quality, and loyalty to the crew remain the foundation. The goal is to honor that culture by investing in the people who live it, so the best people do more than stay. They help bring along the next generation.

The trades have always attracted people who build things that last. The invitation now is to apply that same mindset inward and build workplaces with the same durability as the structures they produce. The world is built by people. Investing in them strengthens the work today, the results tomorrow, and the future ahead. ■



Feature



Owner Corri Langlois stands behind the counter at Gastro Pup, where community and conversation are part of the experience

Gastro Pup Brings Community-Focused Pet Care to Downtown Bremerton

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

When Corri Langlois opened Gastro Pup in downtown Bremerton, she wasn't just launching another pet supply shop. She was building the kind of community she'd been missing—one built around pets, relationships, and the belief that most people are doing the best they can for the animals they love.

"I've worked in the pet specialty industry pretty much since I started working," Langlois said. She began as a dog bather back in 2004, and that early job sparked what she describes as a growing obsession with dog nutrition and wellness.

Over the years, she managed other people's pet stores, worked for a major independent retailer, and then joined a pet food distributor doing outside sales

across Washington. The job took her to "every pet store in the state," she said, and while she loved visiting shops, she hated the isolation and the long hours away from her two kids.

"I missed the community you have when you work in a store every day," she said. "I'd go into stores to help them, and I'd end up helping customers instead of selling

products. I just wanted to be on the floor, talking to people about their pets."

When COVID hit, the strain became even more personal. Her son was about to start kindergarten; her younger child was just a year old. With schools closed and daycare unavailable, she stepped back from retail to stay home and do online kindergarten.

"It was the longest and hardest year of my life," she said. "I love my kids, but I am not a stay-at-home mom and I'm not a teacher of small children."

That difficult year clarified what she did want: to return to work in a way that made sense for her family and her values. With encouragement from her husband – "chief among" her supporters, she noted – and other industry friends, she began to think seriously about opening her own store.

At the time, she realized Bremerton didn't have an independent pet store. "There



was nothing within 10 miles in any direction," she said. "There was this vacuum of need."

She started building a business plan and looking at spaces downtown. When she found Gastro Pup's current location, it clicked.

"I fell in love with those big display windows downstairs," she said. "I wanted to make it happen – and we did."

What's in a Name?

The name Gastro Pup was born at home.

"It was actually my husband who thought of it," Langlois said. "It's kind of a play on words. A gastropub serves high-end, premium foods, and I've always said the gut is the foundation of all health. So it's like gastro – your gut – and pup, like a dog. Gastro Pup is where you get the good stuff."

She loved it immediately. "It's cute, it's memorable, and it reflects exactly what we're trying to do," she said.

Shelves Full of "Good Stuff"

Step inside Gastro Pup and you won't just find conventional treats and toys. You'll see pig snouts, heads, tracheas, and an array of other body parts – a reflection of Langlois's commitment to whole, species-appropriate foods and chews.

"We have more body parts for dogs and cats to chew on than I think any store," she said with a laugh. "Most people go, 'Ew,' but it's the best."

Behind the scenes, the product selection is anything but random.

"We look for things that are unique and really well made, and we want transparency from those brands," she said. "We ask: Why did you choose this ingredient? Where are you sourcing it? Can we visit the facility?"

Langlois and her team have toured manufacturing plants and grilled brands about their processes.

"We only bring in products we'd be willing to feed our own animals," she said. "There has to be a willingness from those companies to be open about what they do and why they do it."

Listening First, Then Helping

If Gastro Pup has a secret weapon, it's the way customers are treated. For Langlois, personalized, one-on-one service starts with something basic: time.

"It's time, it's listening, it's making sure people are being heard and validated," she

said.

She rejects the idea of a one-size-fits-all solution.

"There is no one product that works for every living creature," she said. "Instead of smiling and nodding and waiting for someone to finish so we can recommend what we think is best, we ask questions and really delve into what their issues are. We're striving to find a solution – not just sell whatever is 'hot' right now."

That approach builds the sense of small, neighborhood community that she missed while on the road as a sales rep.

"I'd say I know about 75 percent of the people who walk in by name," she said. "That's what I want when I go shopping – I want to feel like I'm part of it. And that's what we have here."

Competing by Being Different

In an era when pet owners can order almost anything online – often at lower prices – Langlois is realistic about what she can and can't do.

"I can't compete on price with the major brands, and I can't really compete on volume," she said. "So I don't expect to."

Instead, Gastro Pup intentionally stocks products the big players don't carry and leans into education and service.

"We focus on smaller brands and niches, and on what we can offer that they don't," she said. "The experience is totally different here than online."

The stakes are higher for customers now, too.

"Times are tough, and people want more for less," she said. "A decade ago, people would come in asking, 'What's your most expensive, best product?' I don't see that anymore. Now it's about balancing value with quality, and we try to help people find that balance."

A Store Built by and for Community

From the start, Gastro Pup has been rooted in its neighborhood. Even before opening, curious passersby peeked through papered windows, eager to see what was coming.

"People were so excited," Langlois said. "They told me, 'We need this.'"

That early enthusiasm has grown into strong community support. Nearby business owners have offered help, and

Colorful leashes and collars line the wall, adding a bright touch to the shop's interior.



A dedicated section for cats features treats, toys and feeding essentials.



Large storefront windows invite passersby into Gastro Pup's welcoming downtown Bremerton space.



Feature

Gastro Pup has built partnerships with the local food bank and Collar of Hope, donating pet food and supplies.

"It's hard to get pet food into the hands of people who really need it," she said.

For Langlois, the most meaningful moments often happen beyond the shop.

"If I can give food or a jacket to someone who needs it, that's everything," she said. "That animal means so much to them. Making sure it gets to eat – that matters."

Parenting, Entrepreneurship, and a Store That Feels Like Family

When Gastro Pup opened, Langlois's youngest child was three. He came to work with her every day.

"There's a room downstairs that we keep our cans in now, but that was his playroom," she said. "He was there every step of the way."

One of Gastro Pup's resident cats keeps watch from atop a stack of pet food bags.



Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Shelves of supplements offer additional support for pet health and wellness.



Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio



Gastro Pup offers many toy, treat, and healthy food options for pets.

Balancing parenting with running a six-day-a-week business has been one of her biggest challenges.

"Unless you're a parent or a small business owner – or both at the same time – you don't fully understand what it's like to work that much and always have a child with you," she said. "I worried he was being shortchanged, not getting to play with other kids his age."

Over time, she realized he was building a different kind of childhood: one filled with customers, dogs, and a rotating cast of familiar faces.

"He's got friends he's met here who still come in," she said. "They come through the door and it's like, 'Oh, Linda's here!'"

Gastro Pup is, in many ways, a family business. Her kids still spend time in the shop. Her niece helped build out the space and has worked there. And the staff itself feels like an extended family.

Looking Ahead: More Space, More Services, Same Heart

Even as Gastro Pup settles into its identity – last year, the store was voted Best Pet Store in Kitsap County, a milestone Langlois calls a "dream come true" – she's already thinking

A Gastro Pup team member talks with a customer, offering guidance on nutrition to find the right fit for their pet.



Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio



about what's next.

"I need more room," she said.

Her vision for the future includes expanding the store's footprint, but not abandoning its downtown roots.

"I don't want to move far from where we are," she said. "I just want to get a little bit bigger so we can offer a little bit more."

That might include closer partnerships with dog trainers and additional services that complement the store's nutrition and retail focus.

Whatever changes come, she's determined to hold on to the sense of joy that first drew her into the industry.

"I used to joke, 'If you're not having fun, you're doing it wrong,'" Langlois said. "And I realized – it's not a joke. That's real life. If you're not having fun, you're doing it wrong."

Most days, she still doesn't want to leave.

"I look forward every single day to walking through these doors," she said. "And I'm a little bit sad when I go home, because I'm like, 'Oh, I was having so much fun.'"

In Bremerton, Gastro Pup is more than a pet store. It's a place where nutrition is taken seriously, pets are treated like family, and the humans who love them are reminded that doing their best is enough. ■



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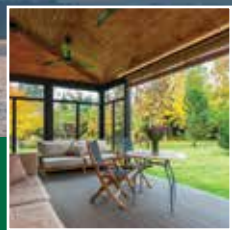
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Health & Wellness

Maintenance-Free Living

Reclaiming Time and Joy in Senior Living Communities

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

As we age, the charming home that once held joyful memories can slowly become a source of stress. Between climbing ladders to clean gutters, shoveling snow, or worrying about an aging HVAC system, the burden of home upkeep often outweighs the benefits of ownership. Senior living communities offer a liberating alternative, often referred to as “maintenance-free living,” which transforms the retirement experience from stressful management to joyous living.

The True Cost of Aging in Place

While many prefer to “age in place,” the physical and financial demands of maintaining a home can become overwhelming.

- **Physical Safety Hazards:** Tasks like cleaning, landscaping, and repairs can pose significant fall risks and safety hazards for older adults.
- **Unpredictable expenses:** Unexpected repairs—like a broken appliance or roof leak—can disrupt a fixed retirement budget.
- **Isolation and Stress:** Managing a home

alone can lead to feelings of isolation and overwhelming stress, reducing overall quality of life.

The Maintenance-Free Lifestyle

Senior living communities—including independent living, assisted living, and memory care communities—are specifically designed to remove these burdens.

- **Exterior Upkeep and Safety:** Maintenance teams handle all maintenance with the help of some friendly vendors such as lawn care, landscaping, snow removal, and major building repairs. With all of this help, it ensures safe walking paths, prevents falls, and keeps the surroundings beautiful without any effort from the residents.
- **Housekeeping and Interior Maintenance:** Regular housekeeping services are commonly provided, taking care of cleaning tasks. The maintenance

team are available to fix appliances and handle repairs within individual residences.

- **Safety and Security:** Beyond fixing items, maintenance includes ensuring safety and security. This often includes well-lit common areas, emergency call systems in every apartment, providing peace of mind for both seniors and their families.

Benefits Beyond A Fixed Home

Reclaiming the time and energy spent on home maintenance allows seniors to invest in themselves and their social connections.

- **More Time for Hobbies:**

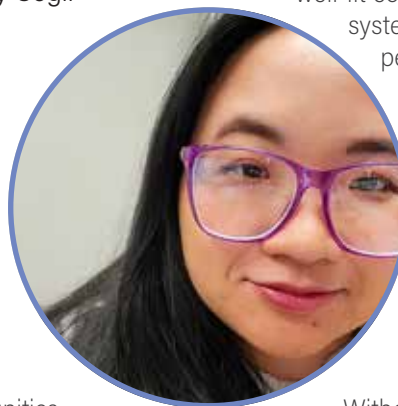
Without the, “to-do” list, seniors are free to explore passions and hobbies like painting, gardening, reading, or learning new skills.

- **Built-In Socialization:** Communities provide structured activities, group outings, and communal spaces that foster friendships, directly combating the loneliness many seniors face at home.
- **Wellness and Fitness:** Many communities offer fitness rooms, swimming pools, and specialized wellness programs that promote a healthier lifestyle.
- **Financial Predictability:** Instead of unexpected repair costs, residents often pay a predictable monthly fee that covers housing, utilities, maintenance, and many amenities.

A Smooth Transition

Moving to a senior living community is most beneficial when done proactively, while residents are still active and able to enjoy the amenities and social opportunities. For many, this move is viewed as a “declaration of independence,” freeing them from the chores of life so they can live it to the fullest.

Senior living communities offer far more than just a home – they offer a lifestyle, security, and community, allowing seniors to swap the stress of home maintenance for a truly “maintenance-free” life. ■





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Lynette Ladenburg stands before colorful artwork inside Martha & Mary, a reflection of the warmth and creativity woven throughout the space.

Executive Q & A

Meet Lynette Ladenburg, CEO of Martha & Mary

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Photos Courtesy
of Olya Blase

With more than a century of service behind it, Martha & Mary has long been a cornerstone of care for children, seniors and families across Kitsap County. Today, as demand for accessible, high-quality care continues to grow, the organization is evolving to meet modern challenges while staying rooted in its founding values of compassion and community.

At the helm is CEO Lynette Ladenburg, whose three-decade career in senior living and healthcare has been guided by a deep commitment to mission-driven service. From her early days in finance to her leadership role today, Ladenburg brings both operational expertise and a personal sense of purpose to an organization uniquely focused on supporting people across every stage of life.

In this Executive Q&A, Ladenburg shares insights into her journey, the organization's

intergenerational approach to care, and how Martha & Mary is navigating workforce challenges, funding pressures and growing community needs – while continuing to serve as a trusted resource for families throughout the region.

Can you share a little about your background and what led you to your role as CEO of Martha & Mary?

More than 30 years ago, I entered the senior living field, initially accepting a CFO role without fully realizing how deeply the work would shape my life. It quickly became clear that this was more than a career – it was a calling. Serving individuals and families during some of the most meaningful seasons of their lives has been both humbling and deeply rewarding.

As my passion for healthcare grew, I pursued and earned my Master's degree in Healthcare and my Nursing Home

Administrator's License. Throughout my career in healthcare and community-based services, primarily within mission-driven organizations, I have been guided by the belief that leadership rooted in care, empathy, and respect creates communities where people truly feel at home.

Martha & Mary drew me in through its rich history, values-based mission, and its unique intergenerational model of care. Supporting both the youngest and oldest members of our community reflects a truly holistic approach to family care and made the opportunity to lead Martha & Mary especially compelling.

For readers who may not be familiar, how would you describe the mission and role of Martha & Mary in Kitsap County?

Martha & Mary is a lifespan organization serving children, seniors, and families throughout Kitsap County. Our programs

include quality caregiving for infants and toddlers through Pre-K, as well as safe and engaging before-and-after school care at six local elementary schools. We have two independent senior housing locations and manage an assisted living community in Bremerton. Our health services/ nursing home, located in the heart of Poulsbo, has a strong focus on medical and physical rehabilitation services, as well as long-term care for seniors. As one of the only nonprofit providers of senior care in the county, we remain deeply focused on mission, accessibility, and community, serving all people regardless of faith, ethnicity, or economic status.

At our core, Martha & Mary exists to support individuals and families during life's most vulnerable moments. We walk alongside people with dignity, compassion, and respect, whether nurturing a young child's growth, supporting a senior to live as independently as possible, or providing care during times of transition.

For generations, Martha & Mary has been woven into the fabric of Kitsap County. Most people here know someone who has been cared for by our organization, either a child, a senior, or someone who has been employed by Martha & Mary. We are proud to be a large employer in the community, providing meaningful, mission-



Behind the scenes, staff keep Martha & Mary running day to day, supporting the organization's wide range of services.

driven work and contributing to the county's overall well-being.

Martha & Mary is here when our community needs us, offering trusted care across the lifespan.

Martha & Mary has been caring for the community since 1891. How do you balance honoring that legacy while evolving to meet today's needs?

Our history is one of our greatest strengths. This year, we are honored to celebrate Martha & Mary's 135th anniversary of serving the community. The values that guided our founders in 1891 – service, compassion, and community – continue to shape who we are today.

At the same time, we are deeply committed to evolving to meet the changing needs of those we serve. This means modernizing care models, strengthening operations, and pivoting thoughtfully when

needed. A recent example is the development of our new Child Care and Learning Center, which expands our ability to serve more children and support working families. Similarly, we have reduced the size of our nursing home to better align with current market needs, while continuing to focus on high-quality rehabilitation and long-term care services.

Honoring the past does not mean standing still. It means carrying forward our enduring values while making responsible decisions that ensure Martha & Mary remains responsive, sustainable, and impactful for generations to come.

Your organization serves both seniors and children. How do those services work together to support families in the region?

By serving both seniors and children, we support entire

family systems, often caring for multiple generations within the same family, from children in our early learning programs to grandparents in our senior communities.

In fact, intergenerational programming is a valued part of our work, connecting preschool and pre-K students with "grandmas and grandpas" through joyful shared experiences such as Easter egg hunts, costume parades, and art and music activities. Bridging these generations together builds meaningful relationships and lasting memories. We also extend this impactful program beyond Martha & Mary by partnering with other senior care providers throughout Silverdale.

At Martha & Mary, those connections often come full circle. Children we once cared for sometimes return to work with us, and we are honored to later care for individuals who have served as employees. It is a life-span approach rooted in relationship, continuity, and community.

What are some of the most pressing needs you're seeing among seniors, children, and families in Kitsap County today?

We're hearing every day from the families and seniors we serve that finding care that is both available and affordable is becoming harder. Whether it's a family searching for reliable



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Executive Q & A

childcare or a senior needing support to remain safe and connected, the options are often limited, and the costs can feel overwhelming.

At the same time, federal and state funding that helps support this care is being drastically reduced, even as the cost of providing it continues to rise. That reality puts added strain on families and on organizations like ours that are committed to serving everyone who comes through our doors, especially those, like us, that are not-for-profit organizations.

That's why community support matters

Martha & Mary provides care across generations, supporting both seniors and children through its wide range of services.



so deeply. Financial support from the community helps ensure care remains accessible, and just as importantly, public voices help remind elected decision-makers how important it is that they continue funding care for seniors, children, and families. That support allows us to continue showing up for our community when it matters most.

Access to quality care continues to be a challenge in many communities. How is Martha & Mary working to meet that need locally?

We are proud to be one of Washington State's largest providers of Medicaid long-term care, ensuring seniors receive high-quality care regardless of financial circumstances. We also offer affordable senior housing and assisted living options, serving individuals and families across the economic spectrum. **In 2025, Martha & Mary provided more than \$750,000 in uncompensated care.**

Access also extends to working families. We provide reduced-rate childcare for employees, military families, and local school district staff, and participate in state-subsidized childcare programs to lower childcare costs for lower-income families.

Workforce shortages are affecting many care providers. How is your organization approaching recruitment and retention?

Our workforce is the heart of Martha & Mary, but we are experiencing the same labor challenges seen across the healthcare and childcare sectors. Finding and retaining qualified professionals has become increasingly difficult, even as demand for high-quality care continues to grow.

We address recruitment and retention by prioritizing workplace stability, leadership development, and creating an environment where employees can envision a long-term future at Martha & Mary. We offer competitive pay and comprehensive benefit packages, but we also invest in our employees by offering opportunities for professional growth, including scholarship programs and educational support through our relationship with Olympic College. Just as importantly, we foster a culture in which staff feel respected, supported, and genuinely valued for the essential work they do every day.

Community partnerships are often key in this sector. How does

Martha & Mary collaborate with other organizations in Kitsap County?

One of our most significant affiliations is with Olympic College, where we collaborate to support nursing and early childhood education and help build a strong workforce pipeline. Through these partnerships, our childcare staff can access Early Achievers, a grant-funded scholarship program that supports earning early childhood education credits. We also sponsor up to five students per cohort in the Olympic College Nursing Assistant Training Program, providing paid class and training time and a guaranteed position at Martha & Mary upon successful completion. In addition, Martha & Mary serves as a clinical training site for multiple levels of Olympic College nursing programs.

Our partnerships with Central and North Kitsap school districts are also critical. By providing before-and-after school care, we help alleviate childcare challenges for working families while offering children a safe, structured environment to learn and thrive.

In senior services, we partner with the Bremerton Housing Authority to manage and operate Bay Vista Commons Assisted Living & Memory Care, leveraging our senior living expertise. This environment provides quality housing to those dependent on Medicaid services.

Together, these partnerships create meaningful pathways into healthcare and early learning careers, support professional growth for our workforce, and allow us to maximize shared expertise and resources for greater community impact.

What are some initiatives or programs you're currently working on that you're particularly excited about?

I am especially excited about the continued strengthening of our senior services and early learning programs, including the recent expansion of our childcare operations. We now care for more than 500 children each month, helping meet a critical need for working families across the county while supporting a strong local workforce.

Alongside this growth, we are focused on improving operational efficiency so we can reinvest directly in care. We are also placing a strong emphasis on staff development, long-term sustainability, and increasing community awareness of our mission.



Children at Martha & Mary learn fire safety basics during a visit from the Poulsbo Fire Department.

Expanding our fundraising efforts is an important part of that work, as philanthropic support allows us to address state and federal funding gaps so we can continue serving the community with compassion and excellence for generations to come.

Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of Martha & Mary?

My vision is for Martha & Mary to continue as a trusted, innovative, and compassionate leader in community care. We will remain deeply rooted in our values while adapting to meet future needs. Most of all, I want families in Kitsap County to

know that Martha & Mary will be there for them, no matter the season of life.

What motivates you personally as you lead an organization centered on caring for the community?

I am motivated by the people – our residents, families, children, and the dedicated staff who show up every day with heart and commitment. Knowing that our work directly impacts dignity, connection, and quality of life is incredibly meaningful. Leading an organization that truly cares for its community is both a responsibility and a privilege. ■



Lynette Ladenburg connects with staff, fostering a culture rooted in compassion, teamwork and care.



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The Ecosystem Edge

INSIGHTS FOR BUILDERS, BACKERS, AND BELIEVERS

We Have More Power Than We Think

Why founders, investors, and everyday leaders have more influence on Kitsap's future than they realize.

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

Spring is one of my favorite times of year, because it has a way of revealing what was already growing beneath the surface.

In Kitsap, that means bursts of technicolor in the natural world around us – alongside fresh energy and real momentum across our business community.

For the past three years, this season has meant rolling up our sleeves at Matchstick Lab alongside local founders building the kinds of businesses that make this place special. Businesses like the Bainbridge Play Cafe, now preparing to open its doors to young families; Ardell Salsa, bringing bold flavor to tables across the Puget Sound; and Honey Bee Horticulture heading into another busy season of weddings and events.

This year feels different – and that's a good thing. Our region is stepping into its next chapter.

Building the Right Conditions

It's no longer enough to focus only on helping businesses strengthen their fundamentals. We also need to strengthen the ecosystem around them: access to capital, pathways to growth, and a community that believes entrepreneurship matters.

I keep coming back to three words:

People. Pipeline. Place.

Strong regions are built through people: founders, mentors, educators, operators, and champions willing to show up for one another.

They are built through pipeline: pathways to customers, capital, commercialization, and growth.

And they are built through place: the

spaces and civic infrastructure where ideas can collide and businesses can scale.

Momentum in Motion

That is why we recently hosted a session for women in Kitsap who are curious about angel investing and the role early-stage investors play in supporting entrepreneurs. Capital doesn't appear by magic. It's up to us to create ways for more people to participate: through a first check, new learning, or simply joining the conversation.

It's also why we're launching our first Firebrand Action Lab this month, with another in June, and a new Micro Business Accelerator Weekend this fall – practical support built for busy founders.

And people beyond Kitsap are noticing.

This month, I'll be taking the stage at the Flywheel Investment Conference in Wenatchee – Washington's premier gathering of entrepreneurs, investors, and ecosystem builders – to speak about the momentum building in Kitsap and what it takes to grow innovation-ready regions. I'm especially inspired by the fact that I won't be showing up alone. A strong contingent of founders, business leaders, and community champions from Kitsap will be there, too, helping represent the talent, ambition, and collaborative spirit of our region.



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

Similarly, Kitsap will also be well represented at the NW Tech Bridge PNW Technology Showcase in Tacoma this month, where companies in robotics, advanced manufacturing, sensing technologies, industrial automation, and defense-ready systems will connect with investors, industry leaders, academic partners, and Navy stakeholders to tackle urgent real-world challenges faced by NUWC Keyport.

Why It Matters

Earlier this spring, Soka University returned to Poulsbo with a select group of global students for a learning journey through some of the Pacific Northwest's most innovative organizations – including a powerful visit to Suquamish Seafoods, where tribal enterprise and economic sovereignty were on full display. Visits like this one remind me that Kitsap has something distinct to offer the world.

But recognition alone is not enough. Real momentum requires local participation – from founders and investors to educators, institutions, and civic leaders.

When municipalities help open doors to funding, land use alignment, visibility, and strategic collaboration, they strengthen the conditions that allow entrepreneurs to thrive.

The Future We Build

I believe Kitsap can become a place with hundreds of active local investors. A place where starting a business feels possible for anyone with vision and grit. A place where every founder can find support – especially in the hard seasons.

I also believe Kitsap is ready to create a space in Silverdale that can become home to a coordinated civic hub where entrepreneurship, workforce development, community services, culture, and economic mobility intersect under one roof.

Why? Because programs come and go, while infrastructure compounds.

Kitsap has never been so ripe with opportunity for founders, investors, and leaders willing to help shape what comes next, and that is a very special kind of power. ■

Why Now Is the Right Time to Join the Greater Kitsap Chamber

In today's rapidly changing business environment, connection, visibility, and advocacy are more important than ever. For businesses across Kitsap County, there is no better time to invest in those priorities than right now – and one of the most effective ways to do that is by joining the Greater Kitsap Chamber.

At its core, the Chamber exists to help businesses succeed. As the largest business association on the Kitsap Peninsula, it serves as a catalyst for growth, a convener of leaders, and a champion for the local business community. But what makes now such a compelling moment to join?

First, **timing matters.** Businesses today are navigating workforce challenges, shifting

consumer behavior, and increased competition – not just locally, but regionally and globally. The Chamber provides immediate access to a network of peers, partners, and decision-makers who are facing those same challenges and working toward solutions together. Through networking events, committees, and leadership opportunities, members build relationships that lead to real business growth.

Second, **visibility** has never been more critical. Chamber membership offers built-in marketing opportunities that many businesses struggle to achieve on their own – from directory listings and social media spotlights to sponsorships and community publications. In a crowded marketplace, being

part of a trusted organization elevates your credibility and helps customers find and choose your business.

Membership unlocks **practical tools and resources** that directly impact your bottom line. From business referrals and job posting platforms to access to health insurance programs and merchant services, these benefits are designed to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Especially for small and mid-sized businesses, these resources can make a meaningful difference.

Equally important is **advocacy.** The Greater Kitsap Chamber represents the voice of local business at the city, county, and state levels, ensuring that policies reflect the needs of the business community. Rather

than navigating regulatory and economic challenges alone, members are part of a collective effort to shape the future of Kitsap's economy.

There is also a broader moment at play. Kitsap County is experiencing continued growth, increased regional attention, and new opportunities tied to tourism, events, and economic development. Being part of the Greater Kitsap Chamber positions your business to be included in those opportunities – whether through partnerships, promotions, or direct connections to visitors and new customers.

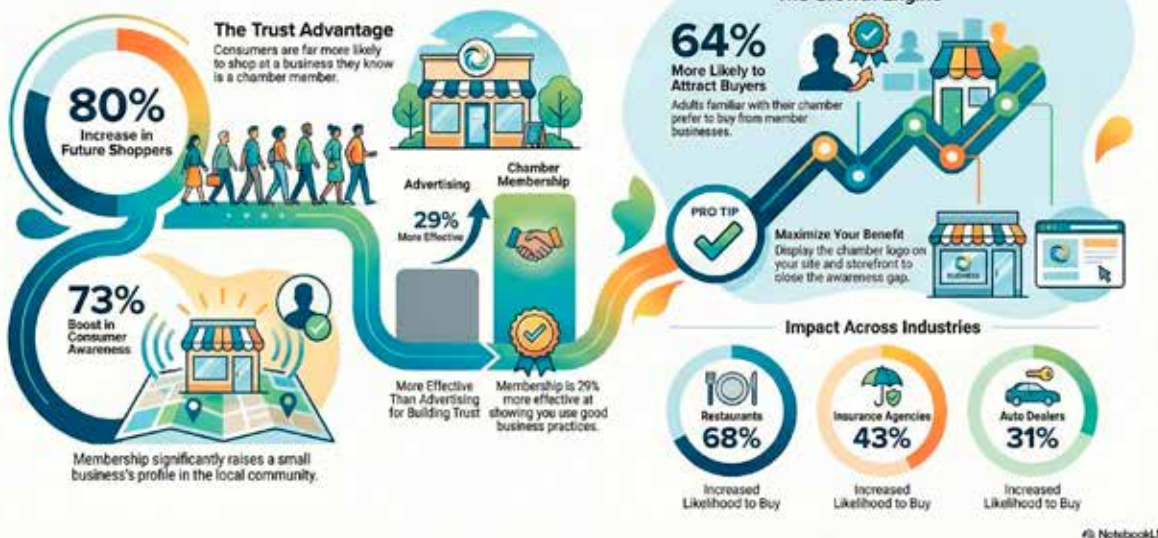
Finally, there is something intangible – but just as important – about belonging. Chamber membership means **you are not doing business alone.** It connects you to a community of people who are invested not just in their own success, but in the

success of Kitsap as a whole. As one member shared, the Chamber helps ensure “you don't have to do business alone.”

The bottom line is simple: joining the Greater Kitsap Chamber is not just a membership – it's a strategic investment in your business, your network, and your community. And in a moment where connection and collaboration matter more than ever, there has never been a better time to get involved. ■

The Chamber Effect: Why Membership Matters

Joining a local Chamber of Commerce provides a clear return on investment by enhancing reputation, consumer trust, and driving business growth.



March Membership Luncheon



We were excited to welcome Kitsap County Commissioner Katie Walters to our March Luncheon to talk about the future of Silverdale.

Attendees heard updates on the Silverdale Regional Center Plan, upcoming traffic signal improvements, and the Gordon Park Master Plan.

Thank you to everyone who attended and continues to champion Silverdale's growth and success. ■



GKC Around the Community

March Off the Clock



We had a great time celebrating St. Patrick's Day with some after-hours networking!

Huge thank you to everyone who joined us, to Graphic Reflections for being such an awesome host, and to Sweet Dahlia Baking for the delicious treats! ■



April Member of the Month



The Greater Kitsap Chamber is pleased to recognize Reliable Storage as our April Member of the Month.

A trusted local provider, and Chamber member since 1989, Reliable Storage has built a strong reputation for dependable service, safe facilities, and a genuine commitment to the Kitsap community. Their ongoing involvement with the Chamber reflects a business that values connection, relationships, and local impact.

Secure Solutions, Strong Community Ties

Serving individuals, families, and businesses throughout Kitsap County, Reliable Storage offers clean, accessible, and secure storage solutions designed to meet a wide range of needs. Whether supporting residents during life transitions or providing space solutions for local businesses, their services help make every day logistics simpler and more reliable.

Beyond their facilities, Reliable Storage

is an engaged community partner. Their team is a regular presence at Chamber Luncheons and Chamber: Off the Clock, where they actively connect with fellow members and contribute to the collaborative spirit that defines the Greater Kitsap Chamber. Their participation helps foster meaningful relationships and strengthens the region's business network.

A Reliable Partner in Every Sense

With a focus on customer service, professionalism, and local engagement, Reliable Storage consistently delivers on its

promise of reliability.

Their active participation in Chamber programs and events highlights their dedication to being more than just a service provider - they are a dependable partner invested in the success and well-being of Kitsap County.

The Greater Kitsap Chamber is grateful for Reliable Storage's continued engagement and we're proud to spotlight them as our April Member of the Month. ■



Join the Greater Kitsap Chamber Today!

Your Connection to Kitsap's Business Community

CONVENER. CATALYST. CHAMPION.

As the largest Chamber in Kitsap County, we bring together professionals who believe business is better when we work together.

- ▶ Networking that builds real relationships
- ▶ Visibility that sets you apart
- ▶ Credibility that boosts your reputation
- ▶ Perks that save you money
- ▶ Advocacy that gives you a voice

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New and Renewal Memberships for March

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

Growth

Kitsap Public Health District (2026)
 Stacy Luckensmeyer, EOS
 Implementer (2023)

Main Street

Kitsap County Commissioners
 (2023)

Business

Bremerton Foodline (2023)
 Cascade Natural Gas (1963)
 CMIT Solutions of Tacoma and
 the West Sound (2025)
 Collins Historical Aircraft
 Foundation (2024)
 Cross Creek Self Storage (2020)
 Fusion Creative Works (2010)
 Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap
 County (2023)
 Kuresman Insurance (1973)

Lisa Stirrett Creative Warrior

Studio & Holy Grounds
 Coffee Co (2026)
 McPysch PLLC (2026)

MOXIE Entrepreneurial Support
 Services (2023)
 NAMI Kitsap (2025)

Port Orchard Roofing (2026)

Puget Sound Genealogical
 Society (2025)
 Rancho Storage Center -
 Silverdale (2018)
 SERVPRO of Kitsap County
 (2011)

Sound Solutions Law PLLC (2026)

Tessera (1999)
 The Ridge an Encore
 Community (2024)

Three Leaves Design (2021)

Western Washington University

Traction Leadership LLC (2024)

Peninsulas (2005)

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.

Why Local Visibility Still Matters in a Digital First World

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

Over the last several days, I have found myself coming back to the same thought again and again.

The biggest opportunity in marketing right now is not a new platform, a new tool, or even a new tactic.

It is something much simpler.

It is showing up consistently.

That may not sound groundbreaking, but in today's environment, it is exactly what sets businesses apart.

The Shift No One Is Talking About

We are in a time when more businesses than ever are relying almost entirely on social media for their marketing. On the surface, that makes sense. It is accessible, it feels immediate, and it gives the impression of constant activity.

But there is a problem.

When everyone relies on the same channels in the same way, it creates a crowded and often ineffective space. Advertisers have little control over the quality of content surrounding their message, while algorithms determine who actually sees it. Organic reach continues to decline, leaving businesses questioning why their efforts are not translating into real growth.

I recently spoke with a business owner who had allocated their entire marketing budget to Google Business. While that may feel like a safe and measurable investment, it is also one of the most expensive ways to fill your sales funnel. These platforms capture existing demand, which

means you are paying to compete for customers who are already searching, often alongside several competitors. Without building awareness and visibility ahead of that search, you are relying on the most competitive and costly part of the customer journey.

At the same time, something interesting has happened.

There is actually less competition in high quality local marketing.

Fewer businesses are investing in strong, consistent visibility across multiple channels. Fewer are telling meaningful stories. Fewer are showing up in places where their community is already paying attention.

This is where the opportunity is.

Standing Out Is Not Complicated

Standing out today does not require being louder. It requires greater consistency and greater intentionality.

The businesses winning right now are not necessarily doing more. They are doing the right things repeatedly.

They are visible in more than one place.

They are reinforcing their message over time.

They are building familiarity instead of chasing quick wins.

Consistency builds trust. Trust drives decisions.

It really is that simple.

Local Visibility Still Matters

Even in a digital-first world, local visibility carries a different kind of weight.

People want to do business with companies they recognize. They want to feel connected to the businesses they support. They want to see you as part of the community, not just another ad in their feed.

That is why showing up in trusted local platforms still matters. Print, local media, community publications, and targeted digital all work together to create a stronger presence than any one channel can on its own.

When someone sees your business in multiple places, it reinforces credibility. It signals that you are established, invested, and here for the long term.

Connection Over Promotion

If there is one area where businesses can improve quickly, it is how they connect with their community.

Connection does not require a massive budget. It requires intention.

Support local initiatives.

Sponsor community events.

Be present where your customers already are.

Just as important, tell real stories.

Talk about your team.

Share why you do what you do.

Highlight the people and experiences behind your business.

People connect with authenticity. That connection is what builds loyalty.



A Better Approach Moving Forward

Instead of asking, "What should I try next?" a better question might be, "Where am I not showing up consistently?"

Because the businesses that will see the most growth are not the ones chasing every new tactic. They are the ones building a steady, visible presence across the right mix of channels.

Online and offline.

Digital and print.

Promotion and storytelling.

When those pieces work together, marketing becomes more than an activity. It becomes a system that supports long-term growth.

Final Thought

If there is one takeaway, it is this.

Do fewer things, but do them consistently and well.

Right now, that alone is enough to separate your business from the majority of the market.

And in a crowded, fast-moving digital world, consistency is what makes you visible. ■

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



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Recruitment

From Ghost Jobs to “Apply-to-Everything”

How Hiring Practices Are Backfiring – and What Employers Can Do About It

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

Last month, this column focused on ghost jobs and the damage they do to employer brand. This month, let's talk about what happens next, because job seekers didn't just notice. They adapted... in a way that isn't helpful for anyone.

Instead of carefully targeting roles, many candidates have shifted to an “apply-to-everything” approach (sometimes referred to “spray and pray”): applying to anything that looks remotely plausible and hoping something sticks. Think less “strategic job search,” more “throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what doesn't ghost you.”

According to recent data from Monster, 48% of job seekers now apply broadly instead of focusing on specific roles. They've learned. When candidates don't hear back, they don't refine. They multiply.

Why? Silence and Uncertainty

Job seekers aren't applying to everything because they want to. They're doing it because the process feels like shouting into the void.

More than half say their biggest frustration is not hearing back from employers. And notably, 76% say they would apply more selectively if employers simply provided updates or feedback.

When the hiring process feels like a black hole, candidates assume one of three things: their application wasn't seen, the job wasn't real, or both. To compensate, they hedge their bets.

The Effect: Volume Overload for Employers

Now the problem swings back to employers.

The average corporate job posting already attracts around 250 applications, and that number climbs quickly when applicants' behavior changes to casting a wider net.

The result is predictable:

- Recruiters/hiring managers prioritize speed over quality
- Strong candidates get buried
- Hiring teams rely more on automation
- Everyone gets more frustrated

It's a bit like opening a fire hose when you were hoping for a glass of water.

Layer that with a complication: ATS and Automation

Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) are doing what they were built to do, manage volume. But efficiency doesn't always equal effectiveness.

When teams rely too heavily on filters and algorithms, strong candidates can be screened out simply because they don't match exact keywords. Candidates, in turn, begin optimizing for the system instead of the job. At that point, hiring becomes less about alignment and more about who can best navigate the system.

The Bigger Risk: Erosion of Trust

This isn't just a process issue, it's a credibility issue.

A majority of job seekers report encountering ghost jobs or feeling ignored during the process. Trust is declining, and when trust drops, behavior changes.

Candidates either disengage or they double down on volume. Neither outcome helps employers.

What Employers Can Do (That's Actually Different)

If you want to break the “apply-to-everything” cycle, the answer isn't more technology. It's more clarity, more transparency, and a little more humanity.

Start with a few simple shifts, like closing the loop early with a “you're still under review” message to help reduce uncertainty.

Audit your job postings regularly. Review and loosen overly rigid screening filters to allow for transferable skills. Make it easier for candidates to self-select out with clearer expectations included in the job description that is linked from the

job ad. Finally, use automation as a tool, not a decision-maker.

And if you're ready to take it further, there are some creative ways to stand out, found in our practical, easy-to-use checklist of ideas you can implement right away.

Final Thought

The high-volume applicant strategy isn't the problem, it's the signal. Candidates are responding to a hiring process that feels unclear and impersonal. Fix that, and the behavior fixes itself.

Because when people trust the process, they don't apply everywhere. They apply where it actually makes sense. ■



Holy Water A Heavenly Lounge

How a historic Port Orchard church became a community gathering place

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Inside a former church perched above Port Orchard, the glow of velvet greens and candlelit reds now replaces pews and hymnals – but the sense of sanctuary remains.

At Holy Water, A Heavenly Lounge, owner Suanne Martin-Smith has traded sermons for a simpler guiding principle: create a space where everyone is welcome, as long as they treat each other with respect.

What began as a family home in a century-old building has evolved into one of the city's most distinctive gathering places, where community, inclusion and a touch of irreverence are as central as the cocktails.

"My rule is no assholes," she said with a laugh. "I don't care what gender you are, how you identify, who you love – just don't

be an asshole. That's the line."

It sounds like a joke, but it's not. In a town that has struggled to retain and attract small, independent hospitality businesses, Holy Water has become one of Port Orchard's most distinctive destinations – a queer-friendly, women-forward bar and brunch spot that has built its business model around community, safety, and inclusion as much as cocktails and delicious food.

Holy Water is owned by Suanne and her partner of 21 years, Paul Robinson, the bar's "main chef of the house." Their daughter Lily Smith handles PR, event coordination, and ordering for the bar. Together, the three form what Suanne calls "the key players" behind Holy Water's layered, experience-driven concept.



Paul Robinson and Suanne Martin-Smith, partners in life and business, are the creative force behind Holy Water, A Heavenly Lounge.

From family home to hospitality concept

Holy Water's story began long before it was a bar.

The building itself dated back to the late 1800s, when it served as a church on the hillside of Port Orchard overlooking the water. For decades, it remained an underutilized structure with character but little direction. That changed when Martin-Smith first saw it.

"I got full-body shivers," she recalled of

peering through the narrow windows one evening as the stained glass cast a colored cross of light across the floor. "I said, 'We're going to live here!' It felt like a higher power telling me this was my space."

At the time, Martin-Smith had been raising a blended family, working multiple jobs and drawing on a lifelong entrepreneurial instinct shaped by her upbringing.

"My mom worked at K2, my dad at the shipyard – we always hustled," she said.

After months of persistence, she connected with the Seattle-based property owner. When a burst pipe threatened the building, she and Robinson stepped in to help – an act that ultimately led to an in-person meeting.

"I called him and said, 'I'm the chick who just saved your building,'" she said. "He told me, 'I'll see you tomorrow.'"

What followed was an uncommon handshake agreement. The owner gave them the opportunity to lease – and eventually buy – the property, trusting their vision despite limited financial resources.

"We built an incredible home, and lived there for almost a decade," she said.

In 2012, that vision became Homemade Café, a breakfast and lunch spot that doubled as both a business and a family anchor. For nine years, the café served the community while supporting Martin-Smith's growing household.

"We made almost no money," she said. "Our profit was about two thousand dollars a month. But it let us raise our kids and build a life."

A turning point - and a new direction

Like many small businesses, Homemade Café faced mounting pressure during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While it survived the initial shutdowns, the long-term strain proved unsustainable.

One difficult day became a turning point. That evening when she sat down to dinner with her family they noticed she was unusually quiet.

"They asked what was wrong," she said. "I said, 'I'm done. I don't feel appreciated for how hard we're working.'"

Homemade Café closed in 2021. But rather than walk away, Martin-Smith saw

A green velvet sofa anchors one of Holy Water's eclectic seating areas, where vintage décor and layered textures create an intimate, lounge-like atmosphere.

an opportunity to reimagine the space.

The initial concept – a wine bar – didn't resonate with the local market. So she pivoted again, this time applying for a full liquor license. With much of the groundwork already in place, approval came quickly.

"I was the first bartender," she said. "We built the bar, and we just kept growing a little at a time. Now we're doing really well."

Holy Water, A Heavenly Lounge officially opened in 2022.

Building an experience, not just a bar

From the beginning, Holy Water was designed to be more than a place to drink.

"We wanted the tenacity and creative vibe of New Orleans, without the sadness of a tsunami," Martin-Smith said. "Creating vignettes, making it an experience."

That philosophy was evident throughout the space. The interior was assembled largely from secondhand finds – Goodwill tables, estate sale pieces and locally sourced décor – each contributing to a layered, lived-in aesthetic.

A former storage room had been transformed into the "Divine Room," now used for private events. A small boutique



A house-crafted charcuterie board highlights Holy Water's emphasis on fresh ingredients and shareable, tapas-style dining.

area where you wait for the bathrooms, called Purgatory, offers refurbished clothing and accessories alongside branded merchandise.

"People want a piece of Holy Water," she said.

Even the bathrooms reflect the bar's personality. Instead of traditional gender labels, guests chose between "Saint" and "Sinner."

"When you own a church, honey, you have to have a little fun," she said.

The result was a space that feels intentional but not overly polished – equal



Feature

parts theatrical and comfortable, with an emphasis on atmosphere.

A kitchen-first approach

Despite its identity as a cocktail lounge, Holy Water places significant emphasis on its food program.

Robinson, whom Martin-Smith calls the "main chef of the house," oversees the menu that includes brunch through early afternoon and tapas-style offerings in the evening.

"We make all our gravies, cook our own corned beef, make our own meatloaf," she said. "We don't bake our own bread, but we use artisan sourdough – higher quality, no high fructose corn syrup."

That attention to ingredients extends behind the bar as well. Cocktails are built with house-made syrups and fresh fruit, and high fructose corn syrup is intentionally excluded.

"We handcraft everything," she said. "Mimosas are huge here for brunch."

The emphasis is on quality and consistency rather than volume – an approach that aligns with the lounge's smaller footprint and curated feel.

Growing people along with the business

If Holy Water has a defining strength, it may be its approach to team-building.

Martin-Smith hires with an eye toward potential, often bringing on employees who are new to the industry.

Brunch offerings at Holy Water blend comfort classics with elevated, made-from-scratch ingredients.



"I hire a lot of green people," she said. "I love watching them grow."

That philosophy extends to how roles are earned. Everyone starts as a server, with bartending seen as a progression rather than an entry point.

"My dad always said, 'The cream will rise to the top,'" she said. "We really believe that."

The business operates on a tip-share model that includes both front- and back-of-house staff, reinforcing a team-first mentality.

"You can't do your job out front if you don't have the back," she said. "We're one team."

Her leadership style blends directness with mentorship.

"I don't yell at my team," she said. "If something's not right, I communicate. I'm a mom."

That approach helps create a workplace culture where employees feel supported not just professionally, but personally.

Second chances and lasting impact

For Martin-Smith, building a business has always been about more than revenue.

She believes in giving people opportunities – even when they might not fit a traditional mold. She recalls one employee's interview when giving a chance paid off for both the business and the individual.

"He told me he gets nervous being too close to people he doesn't know, and I was right up in his face because it was loud," she said. "I backed way off and said, 'I'm so sorry.' That honesty took courage, so I gave him a chance."

Over time, she watched that employee grow into a key member of the team.

Moments like that, she said, define what Holy Water stands for.

The same philosophy extends beyond staff. The space has become a gathering place for connection – whether through events, casual nights out or staff game nights.

"If you have a goal and you share it with us – going back to school, getting custody of your kid, getting a promotion somewhere else – we're going to help you get there," she said. "If that means throwing you a going-away party when you move on, we will. We're devastated, but we're proud."

A space with history - and purpose

More than a century after it was first

A handcrafted cocktail showcases Holy Water's focus on house-made syrups, fresh fruit and carefully curated flavors.



built, the church that houses Holy Water continues to serve its community – just in a different way.

"It was a great place to raise our family," Martin-Smith said. "And I felt that because, you know, churches – it's a place of celebration, even if someone's life has come to an end. It's a celebration of life. And you think of all that positivity, and I think old buildings have good vibes."

That sense of continuity – honoring the past while creating something new – runs through every aspect of the business.

Holy Water stands as a reflection of its owners' resilience, creativity and belief in people. It is a place where cocktails are handcrafted, décor is curated and community is intentional.

In a competitive and often unpredictable hospitality landscape, that combination has proven to be more than enough.

It has turned a former church into something rare: a business built not just on service, but on belonging. ■

A selection of handcrafted cocktails reflects the bar's commitment to quality, creativity and consistency.



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Personal Development

Built to Last

Business and Life Lessons from The Masters

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

You don't need to be a golf fan to have heard of the annual professional tournament held in Augusta, GA called The Masters.

This year's edition, played every April, marked the 90th tournament in its history. Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland became only the fourth golfer ever to win it in back-to-back years. The Masters is one of professional golf's major championships. It's a tradition unlike anything other in the game.

Don't worry. This isn't a column about golf!

It's about what happens when an organization commits to tradition and standards at such a high level that it creates something unique and wildly successful.

Let's discuss four ways that can relate directly to your business and career.

EXCLUSIVITY

Unlike most sporting events, attending the Masters isn't about affording a ticket. It's about access.

Tickets are relatively inexpensive, if you're fortunate enough to get one.

Some "patrons" (not "fans") hold lifetime badges. These are non-transferable, and no new ones have been issued since the process permanently closed in 2020. Everyone else enters a lottery nearly a year in advance.

There's something powerful about exclusivity in business.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) exists because perceived and actual value is high and access is limited. When demand exceeds availability, value rises.

What does your business offer that feels exclusive to your "patrons?" What do they fear missing out with you?

When access to what you provide is so valuable that missing out feels like a loss,

you've built something that lasts.

What are you offering that creates that kind of allure? What could you be offering?

NO PHONES

Contrary to the world we live in, mobile phones aren't allowed on property.

That's right, no texting, selfies, video creation for TikTok or Instagram, no instant updates. The ubiquitous nature of our little hand-held computers is gone at Augusta National. Patrons are forced to focus on what's in front of them; to enjoy the shared experience of the event and actually talk with the people around them.

And nobody complains. In fact, they embrace it.

They enjoy the simplicity of watching scoreboards updated by hand, not by some digital monstrosity. Everyone experiences the tournament in real time, together.

In business, simple still wins.

When things get too busy, too complex, or too hard to access, frustration follows. How often would you love to call a company and have a human answer instead of being told to "listen carefully, as our options have changed" (they haven't)?

What can you do to simplify your business for the improvement of your clients?

INNOVATION

While The Masters has a timeless feel around the event, the leadership at Augusta National doesn't sit on their success. They constantly evolve and innovate.

As technology and talent have allowed golfers to hit the ball further than ever, the golf course needed to respond to that or become obsolete. The leadership

at Augusta responded by changing the legendary course setup. They have adapted by lengthening holes and adding hazards to remain relevant. They did this without sacrificing the experience and enjoyment of the players and patrons.

When was the last time you innovated in your business?

I believe in business and life that we should always be reinventing ourselves.

That's the concept discussed in an earlier column about "chasing edges."

Examples include: Improving how we deliver. Listening to our clients. Anticipating what's next before it forces our hand.

What's next for you?

One final lesson comes from the players chasing that coveted green jacket bestowed to the champion.

Golf isn't linear.

Each of the 18 holes of a course are an entity in and of themselves. They have their own vibe. Each comes with hazards both seen and unseen. They each have a path for success mixed in with uncertainty and luck.

Even the most skilled golfers will struggle. The ones that enjoy the greatest success are the most resilient; the grittiest; and the ones that embrace the uncertainty.

Business and life are also not linear.

Are you physically, mentally and emotionally prepared to play each hole, accept the result, and keep playing?

We all get to play our own "course" daily. We face opportunities and obstacles. Like the leadership at Augusta and the golf pros who compete on the course, we succeed when we embrace the challenge, accept the result, and set up to the next shot. ■





Kingston's Newest Waterfront Retail!

Downtown Kingston was delighted to officially welcome its newest retail shop in April!

Several Chamber board members were on hand to welcome Amy Harper and her co-vendors with a ribbon cutting at the **Waterfront Gift Shop**, located just above the iconic crepe shop across from Kingston's waterfront.

Amy of **Metamorphic Delights**, was selling her freeze-dried candies at the Kingston Public Market and Sunset Market and met her main collaborator, Rey McCabe there selling mushroom-themed magnets, ornaments, and lawn decor with her business, **I Spy Fungi**.

They decided they were ready for a more permanent

retail space and reached out to other independent artisans in the area to build out the store's offerings.

The result is a true treasure trove – you never know what you'll find around the next corner ranging from Darth Vader charcuterie boards, jewelry, candy, handcrafted purses and works of art, candles and even Kingston souvenirs!

Check them out any afternoon from 12-4pm, 7 days a week! ■

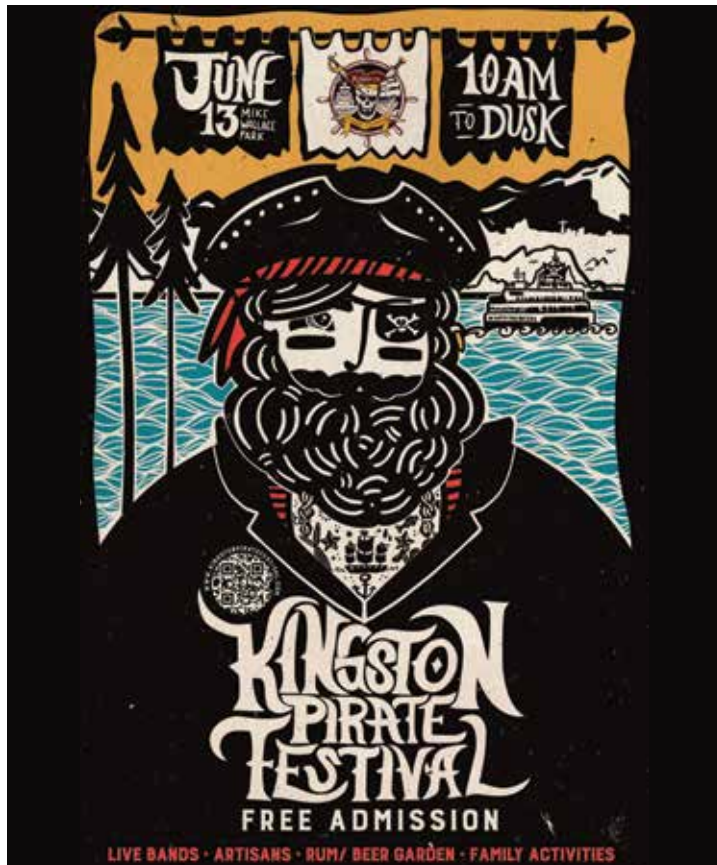


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Real Estate

Kitsap County's Economic Engine



How Real Estate, Manufacturing, Maritime, and Trades Are Powering the Local Market

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

Kitsap County's real estate market does not operate in a vacuum – it is deeply connected to the region's core industries. In 2025, the interplay between housing, manufacturing, maritime operations, and skilled trades has defined both the opportunities and constraints shaping the local economy.

As the year wraps up, it is clear that this interconnected ecosystem continues to drive stability and long-term growth across the county.

A Market Anchored by Maritime Strength

At the heart of Kitsap County's economy is its maritime presence. Naval Base Kitsap, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and associated defense contractors remain among the largest employers in the region. Thousands of civilian and military workers rely on consistent housing access, creating steady demand for single-family homes, rental units, and workforce housing.

This stability has insulated Kitsap County from more volatile housing swings seen in other markets. Even as interest rates fluctuated in 2025, maritime-driven employment ensured a reliable buyer and renter base. For real estate professionals, understanding military relocation cycles and shipyard workforce trends has become essential to anticipating housing demand.

Manufacturing's Expanding Footprint

Manufacturing in Kitsap County – particularly in advanced materials, aerospace components, and defense-related production – has continued to grow. This sector supports a diverse workforce, from

engineers to technicians, all of whom contribute to housing demand at multiple price points.

One notable trend in 2025 has been the growing need for attainable housing near employment centers. As manufacturing jobs expand, so does the demand for entry-level homes, townhomes, and manufactured housing options. Developers and investors are increasingly looking at creative solutions, including smaller lot sizes and modular construction, to meet this need.

Skilled Trades: The Backbone of Housing Supply

While demand remains strong, supply continues to be constrained – and much of that challenge ties directly to the availability of skilled trades. Carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and HVAC technicians are in high demand across Kitsap County, not only for new construction but also for renovations and maintenance of existing homes.

In 2025, labor shortages in the trades contributed to longer project timelines and higher construction costs. This has impacted everything from new home builds to simple listing preparations. Sellers preparing homes for market and buyers planning improvements are both feeling the effects.

However, this challenge also represents opportunity. Investment in trade education and apprenticeship programs is gaining momentum locally, and these efforts are expected to play a critical role in improving

housing supply over the next several years.

Real Estate Reflects the Workforce

The housing market in Kitsap County mirrors the diversity of its workforce:

Single-family homes remain the preferred option for long-term residents, military families, and professionals in manufacturing and maritime sectors.

Manufactured homes are increasingly important as an affordable entry point, particularly for first-time buyers and retirees.

Multi-family properties continue to attract investors, driven by strong rental demand from shipyard workers and contract employees.

This mix underscores a key reality: no single housing type can meet the needs of Kitsap County alone. A balanced approach is required to support the full spectrum of residents who power the local economy.

Looking Ahead: A Connected Future

As Kitsap County moves forward, the connection between real estate and its core industries will only deepen.

Infrastructure improvements, workforce development, and housing innovation will all play a role in shaping the next phase of growth.

For business leaders, investors, and homeowners alike, the takeaway is clear: real estate success in Kitsap County depends on understanding the industries that drive it. Maritime stability, manufacturing expansion, and the strength of the skilled trades are not just economic indicators, they are the foundation of the local housing market.

In a region where ships are built, systems are engineered, and homes are crafted by skilled hands, Kitsap County stands as a model of how industry and real estate can grow together, creating opportunity, resilience, and a powerful sense of place. ■





Kitsap

VISIT Where Maritime Heritage Drives Today's Economy

Before highways and bridges, Kitsap ran on water.

If you lived here in the late 1800s or early 1900s, you didn't hop in your car, you waited at the shoreline. A steamship would come through, sometimes stopping wherever someone waved it down, carrying people, mail, livestock, and goods between communities that would have otherwise been isolated. At one point, this system became the largest Mosquito Fleet in the world. That wasn't just transportation but an economic engine, and still is today.

Every May, we get to see that connection come back to life and get to (literally) step into history.

In Port Orchard, the Mosquito Fleet Fest, held on May 23 and 24, brings people to the waterfront to walk the docks, shop the market, and board vessels like the Carlisle II. It's hands-on, it's local, and you can feel the ripple effect almost immediately: more foot traffic, fuller restaurants, and small businesses having

a strong weekend.

On May 29 to 31 in Poulsbo, the Liberty Bay Festival welcomes the Virginia V, a National Historic Landmark that draws people in. The Greater Kitsap Chamber and Visitor Center will also host a Port to Port Pop-up between Silverdale and Bremerton during the SEA26 games this summer. But what matters most is what happens around all of these maritime events. Families make a weekend of it. Visitors book a stay. They wander into shops they didn't plan to visit and discover something they didn't expect.

It's not just about the Mosquito Fleet. Indigenous Canoe Journeys are hosted and celebrated with our local tribes: the Suquamish and Port Gamble S'Klallam, to honor tradition. Events like Ride the Tide with Olympic Outdoor Center brings together paddlers to journey along the Kitsap Peninsula National Water Trails. All of these events remind us that these waterways have always been pathways for connection,



Ride the Tide

Photo Courtesy of Erinn Hale

movement, and community.

When someone spends a weekend here, that experience threads through multiple businesses: lodging, dining, retail, and recreation. Just like supporting a local shop creates a ripple effect, so does a well-designed visitor experience.

As we head into a busy season and look toward 2026, the opportunity isn't to reinvent who we are. It's to keep showing up as a place that's connected: to our water, our history, and each other.

On the Kitsap Peninsula, the water has always carried more than people; it also carries opportunity. ■

Links:

Mosquito Fleet History -

- <https://kitsapmuseum.org/kitsap-mosquito-fleet-history/>
- Mosquito Fleet Fest - <https://www.kitsaplove.com/read/po-mosquito-fleet-fest>
- Liberty Bay Festival - <https://poulsbohhistory.org/libertybayfestival/>
- Ride the Tide Festival - <https://www.olympicoutdoorcenter.com/products/ride-the-tide>
- Indigenous Canoe Journeys - <https://suquamish.nsn.us/suquamish-canoe-journey-hosting/> or https://www.nisqually-nsn.gov/heritage/Medicine_Creek_Potlatch_Journey
- Port to Port Pop-up - <https://greaterkitsapchamber.com/port-to-port/>



Carlisle II, Mosquito Fleet

Photo Courtesy of Tiffany Diamond



Canoe Journey

Photo Courtesy of Port Gamble S'Klallam

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Next Month: Fitness Myth #3.

Rooted in Bremerton, Built for Impact

The Enduring Success of Art Anderson

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For nearly seven decades, Art Anderson has been a quiet but influential force on Bremerton's working waterfront — designing ships, ferries, waterfront infrastructure, schools, and even floating fish collectors that help salmon find their way home.

Founded in 1957 by naval architect Art Anderson and his wife Bea, the firm began as a small consultancy serving a single client: the U.S. Navy. Today, it is a multidisciplinary architecture and engineering firm with 37 employees, a national portfolio, and a husband-and-wife leadership team — Ben Anderson, President & CEO, and Melissa Anderson, COO.

"We want to be here for another 70 years," Ben said. "So we're always thinking about how to stay strong in our current markets and what's next if one of those markets fades away."

From Shipyard Gate to National Reach

The original Art Anderson office sat just outside the gates of the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in downtown Bremerton. Art, a naval architect employed at the shipyard, saw an opportunity to support the Navy from the outside as a consultant. He and Bea launched



Melissa and Ben Anderson lead Art Anderson as a husband-and-wife executive team.

Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

the firm with the Navy as its sole client.

"For the first couple of decades, the company solely provided services to the shipyard — marine engineering and naval architecture for the Navy — and at its peak employed around 200 people," Ben said. Many were retired shipyard workers who "would retire at 55, come work for Anderson for 10 more years, and then retire again," he added.

In the 1980s, Ben's father Eric Anderson took over and began diversifying. He added civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering to the firm's naval architecture core, and started pursuing more commercial and public clients — including Washington State Ferries, Alaska Marine Highway System, and local municipalities.

That diversification is now the firm's defining strength.

"Today we define ourselves as a multidisciplinary engineering firm," Ben said. "For a small business of 37 employees, we're

pretty unique in that we really touch all disciplines of engineering. We can take on a project that has all the disciplines and do it under one roof."

Based in Bremerton, the firm provides planning and design from early concept through construction. Its work spans naval architecture and marine engineering, waterfront and port design, industrial facilities, shoreline development, and landside infrastructure.

With in-house naval architects alongside civil, mechanical, and electrical engineers, Art Anderson offers a level of integration many larger firms achieve only through multiple partners.

A Husband-and-Wife Team at the Helm

Ben and Melissa both grew up in Bremerton, but their paths to the family business were far from direct.

Ben, an avid boater who "grew up on the

water," initially had no plans to join the firm. He attended the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, then served on active duty and later completed graduate studies at the University of Michigan. He envisioned a 20-year Coast Guard career.

"I still had this passion for the sea and being on boats," he said. "But after our second child came, it was even more gut-wrenching to get underway for four or five months."

As his parents continued running Art Anderson, Ben began to see an opportunity – both to come home and to build a future for his young family that didn't involve long deployments. He left active duty, joined the reserves, and came into the company as a naval architect. Within a few years, he became president and CEO, and in 2018–2019, he and Melissa purchased the business from his parents.

Melissa's path wound through economics, an MBA, and the tumultuous world of banking during the subprime mortgage boom.

"I started working in banking right out of college – that was when the subprime boom was happening," she said. Later, when she moved to California to be with Ben, her bank, IndyMac, became one of the first big institutions to collapse in the financial crisis. "They basically said, 'We'll give you this money if you leave.' And I thought, this is a red flag, so I took it."

After time away from the workforce raising

Art Anderson employees gather on the staircase outside the Bremerton office.



The Port of Bremerton marina, designed by Art Anderson, showcases the firm's waterfront expertise.

their young children and multiple military moves, the couple returned to Bremerton. Ben was stepping into leadership at Art Anderson and asked Melissa to join.

"Honestly, I didn't think so," she said. "Working with your spouse – I already knew that would probably be challenging. And I didn't think my personality would fit in at an engineering firm. It's quiet, serious... I'm like, what if I turn on my music and I'm dancing around?"

Over time, she discovered the culture wasn't as rigid as she feared – and that her skills were a perfect complement to Ben's.

"He brings the engineering excitement and gets really into the projects," Melissa said. "I bring more of the business-savvy mindset. Together, we make sure we're hitting all the important spots to focus on the company."

Ben agreed. "Our personalities and areas of interest balance out well. We both have a real passion to make sure our team is well taken care of and to create that culture of family and feeling welcome within the company."

It wasn't seamless at first.

"He kind of had to learn to trust that I knew what I was talking about," she said. "And he was transitioning from the military into a civilian job, which is a huge shift. Working through all those nuances together was hard, but it was also an incredible learning experience – and it paved a better road for the future."

All of this unfolded as the firm was still recovering from the 2008–2009 recession, which forced layoffs and financial belt-tightening. "In hindsight, I'm thankful for that," Ben said. "It made it clear where we don't want to be again, and we made some fundamental changes to help prevent that."



Three generations of leadership: Art, Eric and Ben Anderson reflect the firm's long family legacy.

What They Do - and What Makes Them Different

At its core, Art Anderson is an engineering consulting firm. Its mission:

"To deliver expert solutions to our customers' challenges and desires through innovative engineering and design," Ben said.

The company operates through two primary divisions: a Facilities Division providing civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering, and a Naval Architecture & Marine Engineering Division focused on vessel design and onboard systems.

"Where those two meet is at the waterfront," Melissa said. "Marinas, wharves, piers – anything that's built on the water or supports something that floats on the water. You need both the traditional disciplines plus naval architecture to do those projects. That's an interesting thing to be able to offer, because most people don't have naval architects. It's a very small world to be in."

Some of Ben's favorite work lives at that intersection. He points to a series of floating fish collectors designed for dam operators in the Pacific Northwest. These massive barges

Feature

sit in reservoirs behind dams, capturing fish and safely transporting them downstream to continue their migration.

"They're floating structures, so it's like a ship, but they have to be moored with civil engineering components," he said. "On those projects, just about every single person in our office has touched the work. It's cool to have projects that everyone knows about and can contribute to – and that we can do all under one roof."

Today, the firm's work spans the country, including ferry projects in Alaska, an all-electric ferry in Delaware, hybrid ferry support for Washington State Ferries, FEMA disaster relief efforts, Air Force base work in Florida, and dam-related projects in California. Locally, the firm has contributed to Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program preparations and designed a new Montessori school building for Star of the Sea in Bremerton.

"Everything from autonomous vessel design to sewer design to a new school—we have those capabilities in-house," Ben said. "For a 37-person firm, that's pretty unique. Our team really appreciates the diversity of projects. We're not just doing the same thing over and over again."

Culture, People, and Place

For Melissa, the heart of the company isn't its contracts or software – it's its people.

"I try to make Art Anderson a place where people want to be," she said. "We offer great benefits – health care and all the standard things – but also ask, what does it mean to work here?"



The Puget Sound Naval Shipyard waterfront, where Art Anderson supports more than 20 active projects.

That answer includes small touches— donut days, coffee walks – and larger commitments. Each employee gets a week at the company cabin, and new parents receive additional time off beyond standard leave.

"As a family company, we're always asking how we make it better for families," she said.

The Andersons are also intentional about staying small enough to feel personal.

"We don't have aspirations to be a 200-person firm," Ben said. "We like being a small business with a family culture. We know the names of all the kids of our employees. We know spouses' names. There's always a desire to be better, but not necessarily bigger."

Being rooted in Bremerton is a big part of that identity.

"We both volunteer a lot – for the school district, the YMCA, alumni associations," he said. "We really love our community."

Melissa is candidly grateful for the support that has allowed the firm to thrive for so long.

"For a small business that's been alive for 70 years in the heart of downtown Bremerton – and successful the majority of those years – that's pretty unique," she said. "I'm grateful for that opportunity. The people who live here just want really good things. It feels

good to be a part of that."

Over the years, more than 2,000 people have worked at Art Anderson, and the firm has consistently given back – through donations, volunteering, and significant support for local engineering education, including Olympic College's partnership with Washington State University, local high schools, and internship opportunities for aspiring engineers.

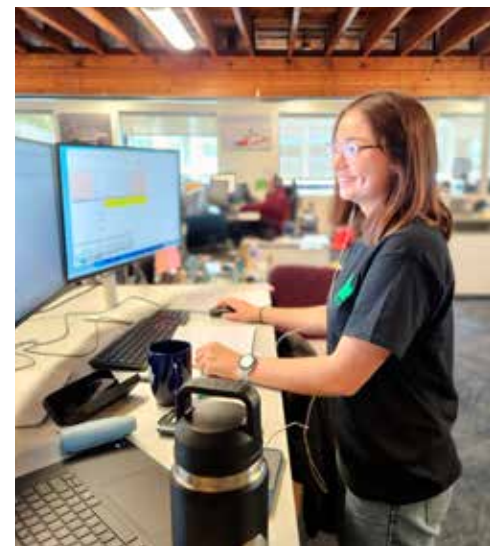
"Whether it's giving back to employees or giving back to the community, it's one of the best perks of being a business owner," Ben said. "We try to do it in ways that are really impactful!"

As Art Anderson approaches its 70th anniversary, the firm stands as a rare combination: a locally rooted, family-led business with national impact, blending naval heritage, multidisciplinary innovation, and a deep commitment to its people and place – right in the heart of Bremerton. ■

Employees at Art Anderson collaborate across disciplines – from naval architecture to civil and electrical engineering, bringing complex waterfront and infrastructure projects to life under one roof.



A North Fork fish collector barge, designed by Art Anderson, helps guide salmon safely downstream.



Technology

AI-Powered Attacks Are Accelerating. Your Cybersecurity Plan Should Not Be Optional

By Jon Hoehne | CMIT Solutions

If you have been following tech headlines, you may have seen coverage of **Claude Myths**, an unreleased Anthropic model reported to be exceptionally capable at finding software vulnerabilities.

Anthropic has also launched **Project Glasswing**, which is intended to use early access to these frontier capabilities to help security partners find and fix weaknesses in critical software before similar capabilities are broadly available.

The bigger, more immediate issue is that AI is already improving the attacks that hit SMBs every day, especially **financial fraud**. In practical terms, AI makes criminals faster, more convincing, and harder to spot.

Here are three AI-powered fraud patterns businesses are seeing right now, followed by the straightforward controls that still stop them.

1) Invoice and wire fraud gets more believable

Business Email Compromise is not new. What is changing is quality and speed.

Attackers can use AI to write more natural emails, mimic tone, produce cleaner "supporting documentation," and iterate quickly when a target hesitates. A fake vendor request to "update our banking details" can look legitimate at first glance, especially when the email arrives during a busy week.

What to do now: implement a "no exceptions" verification step. Any change to payment instructions, ACH details, or bank routing information must be verified using a second channel you already trust. If the process is consistent, staff can follow it even under pressure.

2) Payroll redirect scams become easier to execute

Payroll fraud often starts with a simple email: "Hi, I need to update my direct deposit for next paycheck." AI does not need to break into your systems to make this work. It only needs to generate convincing messages at scale and time them well.

What to do now: require a strong verification process for payroll changes. At minimum:

- Require MFA on payroll platforms.
- Require confirmation for any deposit change.
- Restrict who can approve payroll updates, and ensure approvals are logged.

3) Deepfake voice adds urgency to old scams

The classic "urgent request from the boss" is evolving. With AI-generated voice, criminals can attempt to impersonate leadership well enough to create doubt and urgency, especially in a noisy environment or on a short call.

Even when a deepfake is not perfect, it can push employees into acting quickly. That is the point.

What to do now: create a simple internal rule: no money moves based on urgency alone. Large or unusual payments require a second approval and a callback verification. Make it normal for staff to slow the process down.

The basics still matter, and they still work

Financial fraud is often a people-and-process attack, but the foundational security controls are what keep it from turning into a larger breach.

Backups you can restore. If an attacker gains access, encrypts files, or destroys data as cover for fraud, tested backups determine whether you recover quickly or face a prolonged disruption. Backups should be protected from ransomware and tested periodically with real restores.

Multi-factor authentication for critical systems. Turn on MFA for email, accounting, banking portals, payroll, and remote access. Many fraud attempts succeed because email is compromised and then used to approve or redirect payments.

Offboarding as a security event.

When someone leaves, disable accounts the same day, remove access to shared



systems, reset shared passwords, and recover company devices. Dormant accounts and shared credentials are common entry points for fraud.

Updates and lifecycle management.

Keep systems supported and patched. AI may accelerate discovery of weaknesses, but attackers still regularly succeed through old, unpatched, or misconfigured systems.

Cyber insurance, plus readiness.

Insurance can be a vital backstop, but it is not a plan by itself. Know your policy requirements now, not after an incident. Keep your breach coach and carrier contact information accessible, and understand what evidence and steps are expected during a claim.

Sidebar: What about "zero-days"?

A zero-day is a vulnerability that is unknown to the vendor or not yet patched. You usually cannot fix it immediately because the fix may not exist yet.

For SMBs, the practical defense is resilience:

1. Reduce exposure (limit unnecessary remote access and admin access).
2. Limit blast radius (MFA, least privilege, strong offboarding).
3. Make recovery realistic (tested backups and a simple response plan).

A practical next step

AI will keep improving, and the headlines will keep coming. The best way for an SMB to respond is to make sure the fundamentals are in place, and to add simple verification steps that prevent money from moving based on a single email or a rushed phone call.

If you want help translating these ideas into a simple, repeatable process your team will actually follow, that is where an experienced IT partner can add value. A brief assessment can identify the one or two changes that will make the biggest difference first. ■

Feature

Siren Electric Rewires the Trades with Craft, Care and Inclusion

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

When Sam Wyeth drove through the Kitsap Peninsula on a vacation two years ago, she didn't know she was tracing the outline of her future.

At the time, she was living in Phoenix, working long hours on massive industrial electrical projects across the West. But something about Western Washington lingered – its water, its trees and the balance between city access and the outdoors.

"I got back to Phoenix and just could not stop thinking about this whole area," Wyeth said. "Anytime I had time for a vacation, it was always Western Washington – go hike, go out to the lakes. I just love how Bremerton specifically has the accessibility to Seattle, but then also to the Olympic Peninsula. It's the best of both worlds, city life and outdoorsy life."

Today, Wyeth, along with her wife Brittany Baggett, is the owner and founder of Siren Electric, a Bremerton-based, woman- and queer-owned electrical contracting business that is just six months old but already establishing a clear identity: high-quality work grounded in comfort, safety and inclusion.

Joining her is Sasha Escarcega, Wyeth's best friend and newest employee, who moved from Arizona two months ago as demand for the company grew.



Finding a path in the trades

Wyeth didn't set out to become an electrician. After trying college, she realized she needed a different direction.

"I've always worked with my hands. I was a tinkerer when I was young," she said. "I tried the college route; it didn't really work out for me. Once I left, I knew I needed to learn a skill."

An apprenticeship program in Tucson



Photos courtesy of Siren Electric

Sam Wyeth, right, and Brittany Baggett, owners of Siren Electric, are building a Bremerton-based electrical business focused on quality work, safety and inclusion.

opened that door – and expanded her expectations.

"I thought I was just going to be changing out switches and outlets," she said. "Once I got into the apprenticeship, I learned it was so much more... every job is different. It's exciting and keeps my attention. It's all like a puzzle."

Escarcega found the same program after cycling through jobs that never held her focus.

"I wanted a career. I would get bored at everything and then I would just leave," she said. "There are so many different things you do – it's not the same thing over and over."

The work reshaped her.

"That apprenticeship broke me and then

rebuilt me," Escarcega said. "You gain a certain type of confidence and strength through it... It's the one thing I've done that kept me engaged – and still does."

The two met during that apprenticeship and quickly became close.

"We worked together for two weeks, but we became best friends," Escarcega said.

A different kind of service

Both women experienced what it meant to work in a male-dominated field, often as the only women on a job site.

"There were times when I was the only woman on the job site," Wyeth said. "It was wildly uncomfortable, and I would just have to push through it."

Escarcega recalled how rare it was to see other women in their union hall.

"It was very few and far between that you'd see another woman on the job," she said.

The challenges weren't just social – they affected how they were treated on the job.

"You get moved to another job site or a new contractor and you have to prove yourself," Escarcega said. "It's a constant need to prove your worth, and it's exhausting."

Those experiences shaped the foundation of Siren Electric.

So I wanted to be able to provide a this service that's wildly needed to a niche market to make them feel more comfortable in their homes, like we do. We do a lot of work with women and people in the queer community and in their homes. Your home is such an intimate space, and you have people working around all of your things and your personal space, and so we're able to provide a necessary service without the discomfortability that is usually around the trades."

"I wanted to be able to provide a service that's wildly needed to a niche market, to make people feel more comfortable in their homes," Wyeth said. "We do a lot of work with women and people in the queer community and in their homes. Your home is such an intimate space, and you have people working around all of your things and your personal space."

While the company serves a broad range of clients, many find them because of that approach.

"It just seems to be the majority of our customer base because they find us online or through social media,"



Siren Electric owner Sam Wyeth runs wiring through an attic, part of the company's work updating older homes with modern electrical systems.

Wyeth said. "I just try to provide a different comfort level."

That sense of trust is central to their work.

"We have customers who will just leave and say, 'We feel safe with you here,'" Escarcega said. "It's nice to create a safe space for anybody... where they feel safe in their own home."

Craft and communication

Siren Electric may stand out for its identity, but Wyeth and Escarcega emphasize that craftsmanship and communication are what keep customers coming back.

"What sets us apart is taking the time to discuss with the customer what's going on, what needs to be done, what it's going to look like," Wyeth said. "We're not just showing up to their house, putting a bunch of wires everywhere, and

then being like, all right, it's good and leaving."

Her experience training apprentices helped shape that approach.

"I've taught the trade to a lot of apprentices, so I've had to refine how I explain things," she said. "That helps me explain to customers in plain language."

Customers notice.

"A lot of people tell her, 'I really appreciate how thorough you are, and how you explain it in a language I can understand as a consumer,'" Escarcega said.

That attention extends to the work itself – especially in older homes.

"We've been complimented on how minimally invasive we are," Escarcega said. "We really pride ourselves on keeping things clean... especially in older homes with plaster and lath walls."

They're often called in to fix poor work left behind by others.

"We've seen work where you're like, 'How are you okay leaving this in somebody's home?'" Escarcega said. "We take a lot of pride in our quality of work... The goal is to keep our customers' homes safe and their families safe."

Old homes, new demands

Historic homes have quickly become a specialty for the company.

"Lately we've been doing a lot of

From left, Sasha Escarcega, Brittany Baggett and Sam Wyeth make up the Siren Electric team, a growing Bremerton-based electrical company.



Feature

rewires, especially in historic homes," Wyeth said. "There's a lot of knob-and-tube wiring... We can take a 120-year-old house and bring it into 2026 – without tearing their walls apart."

The work requires precision.

"Those plaster and lath walls are hard," Escarcega said. "It's very tedious... But it's a challenge, and it's also kind of fun."

They're also seeing demand driven by modern electrical needs.

"Rewires and EV chargers have been the hot topics," Escarcega said. "People realize that's a fire hazard... The wire gets old, it cracks, and it's no longer viable."

"EV chargers – we've been doing a lot of those lately," Wyeth added.

A defining project

One early project helped define the company: a 1930s home that required a full rewire and panel upgrade.

"That was our first big project," Wyeth said. "It really pushed our limits on how to keep the historical integrity of the house intact."

The job turned into a complex remediation effort.

"When we came in, it was a mess," Escarcega said. "There was Romex just strung all over the basement. We cleaned that up and fixed a lot of safety issues."

"It wasn't just straightforward," Wyeth

Sasha Escarcega installs and organizes wiring in a breaker panel, emphasizing safety and precision in every project.



Wyeth digs a trench to run underground electrical lines, one of the many hands-on tasks required in residential electrical work.

added. "It was uncovering what they had done... and then doing a complete rewire."

Each step revealed new problems.

"Anytime we finished something, something else would be uncovered," Escarcega said. "But we got to the point where we finally finished and thought, 'Damn, that was cool.'"

The payoff came at the end.

"Turning on all those circuits and walking through with the inspector... it was like, we did it," Wyeth said. "She was really grateful that her house was safe."

"She left us a stellar review," Escarcega added.

Growing with intention

As a new business owner, Wyeth has had to adapt quickly.

"I used to work 60-plus-hour weeks... I thought, 'I'm going to go into business for myself,' and then I just ended up working more," she said. "Now I'm working 24/7"

The biggest shift has been responsibility. Hiring Escarcega was a major step.

"Getting to a point where I realized I needed a second person was scary," Wyeth said. "But it was necessary."

For Escarcega, the move to Washington was immediate once the opportunity came.

"When she said, 'I need your help,' I bought a ticket," she said. "I was supposed to come for a visit and ended up just staying."

Opening doors

Even as Siren Electric grows, Wyeth is focused on creating opportunities for others in the trade.

"Women make up about three percent of the electrical trade," she said. "I want to start taking in apprentices... and teach them in a comfortable atmosphere where they can learn how to do it right."

Her goals are clear.

"Within the next year, I want to take on an apprentice," she said. "Then keep building from there."

Escarcega encourages others to consider the trade.

"My advice is: do it," she said. "It's going to be hard but do it. Be trainable. Go in willing to learn."

She emphasizes a mindset of continual growth.

"I always told my apprentices... I'm a forever apprentice," she said. "I always want to learn."

Building more than a business

For Wyeth and Escarcega, the move to Washington has been as much about lifestyle as work.

"I love it here," Wyeth said. "Seeing trees everywhere, water – it's gorgeous."

"I'm obsessed," Escarcega added. "Now I'm here and everybody's so nice... It's wild."

Together, they are building a business rooted in craftsmanship, communication and care – while quietly reshaping expectations of what it means to invite an electrician into your home.

As Siren Electric continues to grow, their goal remains simple: to make people feel safe, comfortable and confident in their homes – while opening the door for the next generation of electricians to do the same. ■

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