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with

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Executive Director of Kitsap
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Choosing the kind of leadership this moment requires

Forward THINKING



Every election is ultimately a choice about the future we want to build.

Sometimes those choices are defined by party labels. Sometimes they're driven by ideology. But occasionally, the decision becomes something far more fundamental.

It becomes a question of leadership.

For me, this year's race for Washington State's 23rd Legislative District, Position 1, is one of those moments.

After careful consideration, I am endorsing Daria Ilgen.

This endorsement is not rooted in party affiliation. Both candidates are Democrats. Nor is it a rejection of the life story that has defined Rep. Tarra Simmons' public service. Her journey from incarceration to becoming an attorney and state legislator is undeniably remarkable and deserves recognition.

But elections are not lifetime achievement awards. And elections are not about our past.

They are decisions about the future.

As publishers, we spend every day immersed in the stories of our communities. We see the challenges facing employers. We hear from small business owners trying to make payroll. We talk with educators working to prepare the next generation. We listen to families who are struggling with housing costs, child care expenses and the increasing cost of simply living in Washington.

One thing has become abundantly clear.

People are tired.

Not tired of working hard. Not tired of investing in their communities. They're tired of feeling like they're falling further behind despite doing everything right.

The affordability crisis is no

longer an abstract policy debate. It is the defining issue facing our region.

When young families cannot afford to buy homes, when employers cannot recruit workers because housing is out of reach, when small businesses are overwhelmed by rising costs and regulatory burdens, we have a problem that demands immediate attention.

This is where Daria Ilgen's candidacy stands apart.

His campaign is centered on practical solutions and economic stability. His background in community leadership, education, healthcare and economic development demonstrates an understanding that healthy communities and healthy economies are inseparable.

Too often, we frame these issues as competing priorities. We act as though supporting business and supporting people are somehow at odds with one another.

They're not.

Strong businesses create strong communities. Strong communities create strong businesses.

We need both.

We need policies that help employers grow while also ensuring workers can afford to live where they work. We need housing solutions that increase supply without sacrificing the character of our communities. We need investments in workforce development that prepare people for the jobs of tomorrow. And we need leaders who understand that every decision made in Olympia eventually shows up around someone's kitchen table.

That requires balance.

It also requires trust.

I've written before that one of the greatest challenges facing our society is a growing erosion of trust in our institutions. Whether it's government, media,

education or business, people are increasingly skeptical about whether those in positions of leadership are truly focused on serving the public.

That skepticism should concern all of us.

Leadership is not about being the loudest voice in the room. It is about earning confidence through consistency, accountability and results.

Regardless of where one stands on the ongoing controversies surrounding Rep. Simmons, they have become a distraction from the work our communities need accomplished. Our region deserves representation that is singularly focused on the future.

This is not about punishment. It is not about ideology. And it is certainly not about personality.

It is about priorities.

Kitsap County stands at an important crossroads.

We are experiencing growth. We have opportunities to expand our workforce, strengthen our economy and build a more prosperous future. But none of that will happen automatically.

It will require thoughtful leadership.

It will require collaboration.

And it will require someone who understands that economic development is not simply about attracting new businesses. It is about creating an environment where families can thrive, entrepreneurs can succeed and communities can remain affordable for the people who call them home.

What I appreciate most about Daria Ilgen is that his approach feels grounded.

He is not running to become a statewide figure. He is running to solve local problems.

That distinction matters.

The best leaders are often those who spend more time listening

than talking.

They understand that progress is rarely achieved through grand declarations. It is built through relationships, through hard work and through bringing people together around shared goals.

Our communities don't need more division.

They need practical problem solvers.

I've written before that winning has become more important than solving. We see it everywhere in modern politics. Too often, success is measured by whether our side wins instead of whether our communities improve.

We should expect more from our leaders.

We should expect them to solve problems.

We should expect them to build trust.

And we should expect them to keep their focus on the people they were elected to serve.

For me, Daria Ilgen represents that opportunity.

This election is not a referendum on anyone's life story. It is a decision about what kind of leadership this moment requires.

At this moment, Kitsap County needs leadership that is focused on affordability, accountability and economic vitality.

I believe Daria Ilgen is that leader.

That is why I am endorsing Daria Ilgen for Washington State's 23rd Legislative District, Position 1.

Because the future we want to build deserves a leader who is focused not on making headlines, but on making life better for the people who live here. ■

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Feature

Finding Harmony in the Chaos

How Entropy Healing Helps Kitsap Professionals Reset

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For Dani Guthrie, chaos is not always something to avoid. Sometimes, it is the beginning of transformation.

"Entropy, to me, is a scientific word that explains how the natural world will tend toward chaos to bring about a new sense of harmony and balance," Guthrie said. "I find that the healing journey is like that. Some kind of chaos in people's lives is often the catalyst for their healing."

That idea now sits at the center of Entropy Healing, the holistic wellness practice Guthrie founded in Kitsap County. Through Reiki, sound healing, tarot, and group workshops, she helps clients – including entrepreneurs, business owners, and professionals – step away from constant pressure, reset, and reconnect with themselves. For Guthrie, healing is not about avoiding chaos. It is about understanding what it can reveal.

From Classroom to Healing Space

Guthrie's path to entrepreneurship began in an elementary music classroom.

With a background in music education, she taught elementary music for about seven years before stepping back to raise her three children. Music, she said, has

Through Entropy Healing, Dani Guthrie combines Reiki, sound healing and other holistic practices to support clients seeking clarity, balance and connection.

always been a source of connection.

"I've always been a spiritual person, and music connected me to that my whole life," she said.

Growing up, Guthrie played saxophone, and that relationship with sound eventually became central to the work she does today.

During a particularly challenging period in her life, she experienced what she describes as a moment of clarity while running.

"I was running, and there was a voice that spoke to me very clearly that said, 'We'll take care of the hands, you do the rest,'" Guthrie said. "I didn't know what that meant."

Following what she calls "breadcrumbs," Guthrie discovered Reiki online, explored tarot, and began incorporating breath,

music, and movement into her personal practice.

"For about eight years, once I discovered tarot, I was incorporating that with my running and music and breath and just working on myself," she said.

When a space became available in Poulsbo, she felt it was the right time to share that work with others.

"When I saw that a space opened up, it just felt like, this is the time, Dani, to start serving others in that way," Guthrie said.

Entropy Healing was born.

Creating Space to Reset

While Guthrie's offerings have evolved, her goal has remained consistent: creating a calm, intentional space where people can slow down.

"In our lives right now we are so busy,

and there are so many things going on that when people come to a Reiki session, it is a clear, calm space where I hold space for you," she said. "A lot of people need a space where they can come in and reset their nervous system. Really, that's the biggest thing."

Sessions often begin with conversation. Guthrie asks clients where they are in life and what they hope to work through before creating an intention for the session.

"I always start with talking about where people are at, so they can feel like they're in a safe space, and we set intentions on what they want to work through," she said.

From there, she combines Reiki, sound, guided meditation, chakra work, and ritual to help clients settle into a more grounded state.

"Our bodies don't know the difference between the thought and the reality of something bad happening," she said. "When our brains get stuck in loops – if it's the news, our to-do list, or caring for other people – our body believes we're actually in that fight or flight place."

She said creating space allows people to reconnect with their own instincts.

"When we create space for ourselves, then it's easier to know our next steps and to hear what we need, rather than what we think we're supposed to be doing," Guthrie said.

Dani Guthrie guides a Reiki session, using energy work, intention and mindfulness techniques to help clients reset and find balance.



Dani Guthrie provides a tarot reading, using the cards as a tool for self-reflection, awareness and exploring personal stories.

"A lot of people didn't know what it felt like to be that relaxed," Guthrie said. "Some fall asleep. Others feel things physically – tingling, heaviness, or sensations in certain parts of their body when I use specific sounds or instruments."

The Healing Power of Sound

Guthrie's background in music heavily influences her sound healing practice, which she often calls "sound journeys."

She uses crystal bowls, drums, rattles, chimes, chanting, and rain sticks to create an environment designed to encourage relaxation and reflection.

"When you play specific sounds and coordinate them with the breath, that sound helps bring your body back down to a more natural state of peace and calm," she said.

For Guthrie, sound is not only about stress relief. It is also connected to creativity – something she believes is important for business owners and professionals.

"The act of listening, and even making music or experiencing it, opens up that right brain part of your body," she said. "That's where our imagination is. If you can't imagine something happening, you can't expect it to come. For people in business, when you have goals, you have to be able to imagine them first."

Crystal bowls are played during a sound bath, using soothing vibrations and sound to help participants slow down, relax, and reconnect.

Reiki, Reflection and Inner Awareness

For people unfamiliar with Reiki, Guthrie describes it as an energy-based practice designed to support relaxation and awareness.

"It's a hands-on healing modality, even though you don't have to touch the body," she said. "To me, it helps move energy in the body. When we have emotional experiences, they can get stuck in our physical body."

She works with the chakra system and uses tools such as a pendulum to observe where energy may feel blocked or unbalanced.

"When you put it over an energy center – like your root, your sacrum, or your solar plexus – it'll spin in a wheel if it's in balance," Guthrie said. "Sometimes if it's not, it might be going straight up and down, side to side, or doing different shapes."

Clients often describe the experience as unexpectedly calming.

A Reiki session creates a peaceful environment where clients can relax, reflect, and reconnect with themselves.



Feature

Serving a Stressed Business Community

Many of Guthrie's clients come to her during periods of change – career transitions, personal challenges, caregiving, or burnout.

"In my one-on-one sessions, there's been a lot of people going through illness, or they're caretaking for people and they're overwhelmed," Guthrie said. "A lot of people are in a stuck place and wanting more clarity on next steps and peace. People need peace."

She sees personal well-being as closely connected to professional success.

"When you can see yourself as being whole, then you can show up for your family, your community, your work, and you can be of service," she said.

As her business has grown, Guthrie has expanded beyond individual sessions to focus more on workshops, collaborations, and community events.

"In the business world, especially as an entrepreneur, it's always on you to do that next thing," Guthrie said. "We kind of feel like we're on our own. I've found that people need that feeling of coming together more."

Building Community Through Connection

Guthrie sees herself as both a teacher and a connector.

"I see myself as a connector and a teacher – connecting people to the parts of themselves they feel separated from, and connecting community through group events," she said.

She has hosted sound journeys and workshops at local spaces including Kitsap Hot Yoga, organized seasonal



A group sound bath at Entropy Healing uses crystal bowls and other instruments to create a restorative experience focused on relaxation and reflection.

gatherings such as Equinox and Beltane fairs, participated in community events, and collaborated with other practitioners.

She has also helped organize fundraisers, including one supporting Recovery Café, a local resource for people navigating addiction and recovery.

"These community events are a way we can support each other," she said. "It connects business owners, shows the community what's available, and lets people discover the thing they didn't know they needed."

Guthrie said holistic practitioners are also entrepreneurs building businesses in the community.

"It is a business community," Guthrie said. "A lot of us have one foot in the 'woo' and one foot in business. You have to be brave enough to step up and put yourself out there a little bit."

Astrology, Tarot and New Offerings

Guthrie continues to expand Entropy Healing with new ways for people to explore self-reflection.

Her website includes a choose-your-own-adventure style astrology blog, where readers can follow prompts and pathways based on their interests and curiosity. The blog blends astrology concepts with personal exploration, inviting readers to engage with the material in an interactive way.

She is also preparing to teach tarot classes – not as fortune-telling, but as a tool for reflection and understanding.

"It's about helping people connect to

Participants gather for a group wellness event that combines sound, meditation, and reflection to foster community and connection.

their own inner compass," she said.

Guthrie is also developing workshops for businesses and organizations, bringing group sound journeys and wellness experiences directly to workplaces.

In addition, she is writing a teaching memoir that weaves together entrepreneurship, motherhood, music, addiction, and healing through the framework of tarot.

"My book teaches the tarot through my personal stories," Guthrie said. "It's about how the cards can help us access our own stories and our personal blind spots."

"We're Ready for New Things"

For Guthrie, Entropy Healing is ultimately about helping people consider new possibilities.

"There's a quote on my website: 'If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've got,'" she said. "Where we're at right now in the world is the result of doing things a certain way, so let's try it a different way."

She does not view holistic practices as a replacement for traditional health care, but as another tool for supporting overall wellness.

"A lot of holistic practices have existed for hundreds and thousands of years," Guthrie said. "Our mindset and how we feel as we move through our day are just as important as our blood pressure, because they coincide together."

Her message to the business community is an invitation to explore.

"Don't be afraid to just have a meeting with an acupuncturist, or try a Reiki session," she said. "You never know how you'll feel afterward. We're ready for new things." ■



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POULSBO CHAMBER Member Spotlights



Family owned and operated by Sabrina Errecalde and Leonardo Presutto, Argensol brings authentic Argentinian flavors and family traditions to Kingston. After serving the Kitsap Peninsula through catering

for the past three years, they're excited to welcome the community into their new storefront. Built on a love for food, family, and bringing people together, Argensol is proud to share their culture and passion with every guest.

Body Motion
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Body Motion Physical Therapy helps women stay active, healthy, and strong through personalized physical therapy and wellness care. Specializing in pelvic floor, pregnancy, postpartum, and women's health services, they provide compassionate, one-on-one care right here in the Poulsbo community.



Nestled in the heart of downtown Poulsbo, Ma Façon TR is a one-of-a-kind French-inspired patisserie and café where culinary artistry meets community. Founded by

internationally acclaimed chefs Tae Tran and Tamas Ronyai, Ma Façon TR brings authentic European pastry craftsmanship and creative flavors to the Kitsap Peninsula.



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Human Resources

When Everything Goes Wrong at Once

By Julie Piazza | SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights

Picture a summer weekend: the ferry is delayed, the parking lot is overflowing, the restaurant is triple-seated, two servers have called in sick, the event coordinator has just quit, and a wedding rehearsal dinner starts in four hours.

This is not a disaster scenario. For many hospitality managers, it is simply a Saturday in July.

And yet, the industry largely develops leaders the same way everyone else does. A seminar here, a policy manual there, a promotion based on performance, and an assumption that the rest will sort itself out. For some, it does. For many, it doesn't.

Tourism and hospitality is one of the most demanding leadership environments in the business world. Thin margins, unpredictable conditions, an emotionally exhausted workforce, and guests who have high expectations and very little patience. The leaders who find their footing here aren't just managing through chaos; they're actually getting better at it over time and that's worth paying attention to.

What sets them apart?

It's rarely the loudest voice in the room or the most polished résumé. The leaders who thrive in this environment tend to share a few qualities. They stay calm without going cold. They make decisions without endlessly deferring upward, and they take ownership of what happens next. Perhaps most distinctively, they know their people. Not just their names, but what's going on with them. Who's running on empty. Who's close to walking out. Who needs a small win today to keep going.

That kind of attentiveness is where 80% of organizations have room to grow. Leadership development conversations often focus on skills, competencies, and succession pipelines. Less often do those skill include whether leaders can read a room, sense what's shifting in a team before it becomes a problem and respond to people as people rather than as resources to be scheduled. That capacity doesn't develop through coursework alone. It develops when someone decides early in their career that understanding people is the core of the job.

Companies looking to build this capacity can start with a few practical approaches.

Exposing leaders to real situations earlier than feels comfortable. Not simulations with clean outcomes, but actual decisions with real stakes and no perfect answer. What makes these moments valuable isn't the experience itself, but the conversation that follows. When leaders reflect on what they noticed, what they decided, and what they'd do differently, that's where growth happens.

Creating visibility into how senior leaders navigate difficulty. When someone earlier in their career watches

a respected leader work through a hard situation without pretending it was easy, it changes what they think leadership looks like. That kind of transparency is a teaching tool, and it's available in every organization already.

Anchoring development to the work itself. In hospitality, the shift is the classroom. Structured reflection at the end of a day, peer observation, coaching in the moment rather than in a quarterly review,

these approaches build the kind of judgment that formal training rarely produces on its own.

There's also a broader question about how promotion decisions get made. In every industry, but especially in hospitality, the person who's exceptional in their current role doesn't automatically have the disposition to lead others.

Curiosity about people, willingness to listen before advising, a genuine desire to invest in someone else's success, these are different qualities than guest service skill or operational excellence. Both matter, but they call for different conversations in the hiring and promotion process.

The tourism and recreation sector entered the post-pandemic period with a real leadership shortage. Many experienced people left and didn't return. That created a gap, but it also created an opening to develop a generation of leaders with intention rather than by default.

The organizations that invest in that work tend to see the returns across the board. Lower turnover, stronger cultures, better guest experiences, and a reputation that draws talent rather than scrambling for it. When people feel genuinely developed, the difference shows up in every interaction. ■



COMPANY / ORGANIZATION	SECTOR	INDUSTRY	HEADCOUNT 2025	FTE 2025
Naval Base Kitsap - Civilian	Public	Military / Defense	24,340	NA
Naval Base Kitsap - Active Duty	Public	Military / Defense	18,360	NA
St. Michael Medical Center	Private	Healthcare	2,087	1,480
South Kitsap School District	Public	Education	1,774	1,483.15
Central Kitsap School District	Public	Education	1,541	NA
Kitsap County	Public	Government	1,198	1,198
Olympic College	Public	Education	1,077	738.75
North Kitsap School District	Public	Education	839	681.92
Port Madison Enterprises	Private	Multiple	769	695
Bremerton School District	Public	Education	720	665
Kitsap Mental Health Services	Private	Healthcare	672	NA
Tessera*	Private	Defense	654	NA
Haselwood Auto Group	Private	Retail	615	NA
Kitsap Transit	Public	Government	543	509.3
Walmart (Est.)	Private	Retail	527	NA
Fred Meyers Stores, Inc. (Est.)	Private	Retail	502	NA
YMCA of Pierce Kitsap Counties (Kitsap)	Private	Healthcare and other	494	NA
Washington State Ferries	Public	Government	488	487
Bainbridge Island School District	Public	Education	459	359
Franciscan Medical Group	Private	Healthcare	447	NA
The Doctors Clinic	Private	Healthcare	444	NA
Noo-Kayet Gaming Corporation	Private	Government	435	NA
Suquamish Tribe	Public	Government	415	NA
City of Bremerton	Public	Government	393	NA

*2026 Data, **2024 Data

◊Some entities hire additional parttime non-permanent staff on a seasonal basis.
Some employers choose not to participate in this list.

All data subject to revision.



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COMPANY / ORGANIZATION	SECTOR	INDUSTRY	HEADCOUNT 2025	FTE 2025
Martha and Mary Health Services	Private	Healthcare	388	NA
Town & Country Markets, Inc. (Est.)	Private	Retail	387	NA
Costco*	Private	Retail	384	218
Encore Communities**	Private	Healthcare	347	NA
Peninsula Community Health Services	Private	Healthcare	341	NA
Kitsap Credit Union	Private	Financial	341	NA
Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe	Private	Government	328	NA
Retsil Veterans Home	Public	Healthcare	328	NA
Olympic Educational Service District 114	Public	Education	315	NA
SAFE Boats International LLC	Private	Defense	275	NA
Winco Foods, LLC	Private	Retail	229	NA
Goodwill**	Private	Retail	205	NA
Kitsap Physical Therapy	Private	Healthcare	203	NA
Gateway Fellowship and Schools/childcare	Private	Education and other	200	NA
Kitsap Bank	Private	Financial	198	185
Watson Furniture Group	Private	Manufacturing	196	NA
Kitsap Regional Library	Public	Government	166	NA
Kitsap Community Resources*	Private	Humans Services	151	NA
City of Bainbridge Island	Public	Government	143	141.3
South Kitsap Fire and Rescue	Public	Government	143	142.5
Central Kitsap Fire	Public	Government	138	NA
Inventech Marine	Private	Defense	135	NA
John L. Scott	Private	Real Estate	134	NA
City of Poulsbo◇	Public	Government	130	NA

*2026 Data, **2024 Data

◇Some entities hire additional parttime non-permanent staff on a seasonal basis.
Some employers choose not to participate in this list.

All data subject to revision.



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COMPANY / ORGANIZATION	SECTOR	INDUSTRY	HEADCOUNT 2025	FTE 2025
Olive Garden Italian Restaurant	Private	Hospitality	125	NA
IslandWood	Private	Education	120	NA
City of Port Orchard	Public	Government	118	109
Sage/Farbank/Redington	Private	Manufacturing	115	NA
Kitsap Public Health District	Public	Government	115	NA
Bremerton Housing Authority*	Public	Government	113	NA
Liberty Shores Assisted Living; Harbor House	Private	Healthcare	110	100
Cascades of Bremerton	Private	Healthcare	104	NA
Trader Joes (est)	Private	Retail	100	NA
Holly Ridge Center	Private	Healthcare	85	NA
WM of Washington, Inc.	Private	Waste Management	91	NA
Crista Ministries (Shores)	Private	Healthcare	90	NA
PUD #1 Kitsap County	Public	Utility	90	NA
Treetop Village	Private	Education	85	NA
WestBay Auto Parts	Private	Retail	79	NA
Peninsula Auto Group	Private	Retail	78	NA
Stirrett-Johnsen, Inc.	Private	Defense	75	75
SabelHaus West	Private	Defense	74	NA
Puget Sound Energy (Poulsbo/Bremerton)	Private	Utility	72	NA
Kitsap Humane Society	Private	Animal Care	69	NA
Fairbank Construction	Private	Construction	60	NA
Rice Fergus Miller	Private	Professional Services	56	NA
Pacific NW Title (Silverdale/Bainbridge)	Private	Professional Services	54	NA
Clark Construction	Private	Construction	53	NA

*2026 Data, **2024 Data

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Health & Wellness

Vacation Gatherings

Noticing the Changing Needs of Aging Loved Ones

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

Vacations are a joyous time for family reunions or playing tourist, but they also serve as a critical window for noticing if aging loved ones need daily assistance.

There can be subtle changes to look out for such as mobility, home maintenance, or memory that often become undeniable, signaling that it may be time to gently explore senior living options together.

When you only speak to your elderly relatives over the phone or visit briefly, it is easy for them to mask difficulties. Extended visits such as summer vacations or over the holidays, however, put the reality of their day-to-day lives on full display.

You might suddenly notice unopened mail piling up, expired food in the refrigerator, difficulty navigating steps, or unopened medication bottles.

These are common warning signs that managing a household independently is becoming a struggle.

Rather than leaping straight to drastic changes, these observations should trigger thoughtful conversations. Approach the subject with empathy and curiosity rather than judgment.

Many seniors are terrified of losing their

autonomy, so the focus should be on how additional support can protect their independence rather than take it away.

Ask open-ended questions like, "How are you feeling about managing the house these days?" or "How would you feel about having some help with the cooking and cleaning?"

If the conversation reveals that they are feeling isolated or overwhelmed, you can begin exploring the wide spectrum of care options available:

- **Aging in Place:** Often, the first step is bringing support into the current home. This can range from hiring in-home caregivers for personal care to installing grab bars and removing tripping hazards. Local resources can often assist in funding or coordinating this.

- **Independent Living Communities:** Best for relatively active seniors who want to downsize and eliminate the burdens of home maintenance. These communities offer social activities, dining services, and a vibrant, maintenance-free lifestyle.



- **Assisted Living:** Designed for individuals who require daily help with tasks such as bathing, dressing, or medication management. It provides a bridge between living independently and requiring intensive medical care.

- **Memory Care:** Specialized, secure communities designed specifically to support individuals dealing with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia.

Taking the time to research each of these possibilities is a proactive way to safeguard your family member's future.

Localized guidance is offered through local Area Agencies on Aging.

Addressing these shifting needs is rarely tied to a single, dramatic event; it is a gradual transition. By using vacations and holidays to observe, listen, and gently plan, you can ensure your aging loved ones remain safe, comfortable, and well-supported in their later.

Recognizing that an aging family member needs more support is never easy. It marks a profound shift in family dynamics, moving from being cared for to becoming the caregiver.

However, acknowledging this reality during the holidays is the greatest gift of love you can offer. Proactive planning transforms the potential health of safety crisis into a managed, peaceful transition. It ensures that your loved ones spend their golden years surrounded by the right level of support, dignity, and community.

Ultimately, navigating this journey together reinforces the deepest bond of family: protecting and honoring those who spent a lifetime protecting you. ■





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Feature

Reimagining Port Gamble

How Raydient Is Turning a Company Town Into Kitsap's Next Destination

By Quinn Propst

Ward Media Staff Reporter

On a map, Port Gamble is a dot on the northern edge of Kitsap County, a postcard-perfect cluster of New England-style buildings perched above Hood Canal. On the ground, it is something far more complicated: a 170-year-old former mill town, a federally recognized historic district and the centerpiece of an ambitious experiment in rural redevelopment.

Raydient Places and Properties, formerly known as Olympic Property Group, the real estate arm of Rayonier TRS Holdings Inc.'s land business in the region, is attempting something rare. Instead of simply subdividing the land around Port Gamble into view lots and cul-de-sacs, the company is trying to transform a closed company town into a vibrant economic, recreational and residential destination while preserving its historic character and protecting the forests and shoreline that surround it.

"It should be a story for a 5,000-acre subdivision or master plan," said Jon Rose, vice president of real estate at Rayonier TRS Holdings Inc. "But at the end of the day, we're only building 225 new homes. It's a really small project for everything that's gone into it."

From Mill Town to Master Plan

Port Gamble's story began in 1849, when

Maine lumbermen Pope and Talbot headed west during the Gold Rush era. By 1853, they had selected a strategic location on Hood Canal where vessels could reach Olympia, the Hood Canal and the Pacific.

The mill town that grew from that decision became one of the longest-running lumber operations in the Western Hemisphere, closing in 1995. At its peak in the late 1920s, Port Gamble was home to 700 to 800 residents, many living in company housing within walking distance of the mill.

As automobiles changed the way people lived and worked, the company town model faded. Houses were sold, and some were moved away entirely.

In 1966, Port Gamble was added to the National Register of Historic Places as a rare example of a Puget Sound community "settled not by wagon train or railroad," Rose said, "but from the water in."

After the mill closed, preservation became both an asset and a challenge. Maintaining aging infrastructure became financially unsustainable.

"It was losing money," Rose said. "To get it back on the road, we had to get zoning, we changed the state law, we built our own sewer plant, we brought five miles of pipe in for water. We did a master plan."

That plan, submitted in 2013, was

approved in 2022.

"From the day the mill site closed to the day we are now able to build homes, it was 30 years," Rose said.

Cleaning Up the Past to Build a Future

While Raydient worked through land-use approvals, the company and its predecessors invested heavily in cleaning up the mill's industrial legacy.

"We started doing environmental cleanup around the year 2000 and we are just at the tail end of that," Rose said. "Tens and tens and tens of millions of dollars that the company spent."

On the former 26-acre mill site, crews dredged roughly 10,000 truckloads of contaminated sediment, restored the





Photo Courtesy of Port Gamble

Jon Rose, vice president of real estate at Rayonier TRS Holdings Inc.

shoreline and replanted more than 1,100 trees.

"The development will only be on about 10 acres," Rose said. "The rest of it's going to be forest and natural, and we've also restored the beach. If you live here you're going to have a waterfront park, which is going to be kind of killer. You can have a cup of coffee, catch a show, go for a beach walk, and you don't have to even look at your car."

For Rose, restoration is not separate from development. It is the foundation of the community Raydient hopes to create.

The Kitsap Forest & Bay Legacy

Beyond the mill site, Raydient's most significant contribution to North Kitsap may be the land it helped preserve.

When Rose joined the company, Raydient controlled tens of thousands of acres of timberland increasingly surrounded by development.

"I told the company, 'Look at all these people moving in on your tree farm. A tree you plant today, you're not going to be able to cut in 40 years,'" he said. "'You need to get out, and I have an idea on how to get out.'"

That idea became the Kitsap Forest & Bay Project, a long-term effort to preserve key blocks of timberland around Port Gamble through partnerships with conservation groups, tribes and government agencies.

Rose began by challenging the community to get involved.

"Five hundred fifty people show up to a meeting," he said. "And I say, 'We're getting out. Do you want to work together to make something amazing? We will work with you, help you raise money, but you've got to buy the land.'"

The effort eventually brought together dozens of organizations.

Over time, about 5,000 acres of Raydient land transferred into public ownership, including large forest blocks and shoreline.

"They couldn't afford the land and the trees, because the trees are worth more than the land," Rose said. "So we kept the trees. When we log and replant, that new tree is the county's new tree. We've created a legacy that's a lifetime. We totally changed the absolute future of this place."

Those preserved lands now support trails, recreation and a mountain bike park that draws visitors from throughout the region.

"You look around Hood Canal, you're going to see mountain bikes," Rose said. "That has changed. People come from all over to do that."

The "University of Port Gamble"

For Rose, the future of Port Gamble is not just about homes. It is about creating a place where people live, learn and connect.

The idea of turning the historic town into another conventional subdivision did not fit.

"Are we just going to subdivide it and sell it off so we have cute homes for fancy people? That felt incredibly typical and lame," he said.

Instead, Rose developed a broader vision he calls the "University of Port Gamble" - a community built around marine science, arts, agriculture and lifelong learning.

"All the conventional wisdom evolved since the year 2000 that if you want to keep your body alive and have a quality of life, you have to keep your brain alive," he said. "You have to stay engaged, both socially and intellectually."

The concept focuses on four themes: marine environment, arts and culture, plants and horticulture, and community engagement.

"In our CC&Rs we make it really clear: if you're looking for a quiet place to retire and then die, this is not it," Rose said. "But if you're looking for a place that's vibrant, that's constantly evolving, where you engage with

people and share this place with the public, Port Gamble is for you."

A Working Waterfront

The waterfront is becoming the first major piece of that vision.

A marine testing laboratory has operated on leased Raydient land for two decades, providing a foundation for a broader marine science cluster.

Building on that anchor, Raydient has convened the Port Gamble Aquatic Science and Industry Collaborative - a group of scientists, shellfish growers, industry representatives and others interested in expanding marine-related opportunities.

"We're going to present a site plan that shows another lab - could be a university lab, a lab the tribe is interested in, space for people who farm shellfish," he said. "It's going to be a whole ecosystem of marine uses."

The waterfront plan also includes cultural

Plein air painters capture Port Gamble's historic buildings and scenic setting.



Photo by Quinn Propst

Feature

elements developed with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, including canoe landings, trails, story poles and structures reflecting traditional architecture.

"That's something that is authentic," Rose said. "It's not cheesy, it's not make-believe, because those families are right there across the bay."

Arts, Agriculture and Housing

The historic village is also evolving.

Former community spaces now host vintage cinema, live theater, music, an art gallery and several fiber arts retailers.

"They're doing vintage cinema, live theater, and music, and there's an art gallery," Rose said. "And that's just the beginning. We will make maker spaces. The second major is arts."

The agricultural district north of town connects farming, events and recreation. Raydient has restored the original Babcock farm and created opportunities for agricultural tourism, including cideries, wineries and additional event space.

"We're allowed to do cideries, wineries, and agricultural tourism up on the farm," Rose said. "Our event center is full. We need a second event center."

West Sound Wildlife Shelter is also planned as part of the community.

"They fit this campus," Rose said. "They maintain a fleet of 100 volunteers, so residents have something to do. There are constructive things to work on – trails to maintain, things to engage with."

Housing remains central to the plan. Raydient's approved master plan includes about 225 homes, including new housing near the historic core.

Even small details are designed to preserve Port Gamble's character.

"Even the detached garages, we have architectural plans for," Rose said.

He expects the buildout to take less than a decade.

Why Port Gamble Matters

Rose believes Port Gamble could become one of Kitsap County's most important economic assets.

"It is one of the only places in Kitsap that is zoned and



Photo by Quinn Propst

The historic Cranmer House is one of Port Gamble's preserved landmarks dating back to its mill town era.

approved for both residential development and business development," he said.

The town already attracts visitors from across the region, but Rose argues that conservation investments need an economic engine to sustain them.

"The way your investment works is you take a bunch of money and you build something, and then that thing you build sends money back. That's what an investment is," Rose said. "The county has invested in 5,000 acres of an asset and has no way to make money on it."

"We'll have hotels, hotel-motel tax, we're going to have employment here," he continued. "We're going to leverage this amazing investment in 5,000 acres, and we're going to capture people's tourism dollars and their visitor dollars, and by the way, give Kitsap a jewel – buffing up this jewel that everybody should be proud of."

Residents already see Port Gamble as a destination.

"Anytime somebody's visiting from out of town, what are we going to do today?" Rose said. "Port Gamble is where they bring their mom every Mother's Day."

A Broader Approach to Community Building

Port Gamble is Raydient's most ambitious and visible redevelopment effort, but it is part of a broader portfolio of master-planned communities designed around housing, recreation and civic amenities.

One example is Harbor Hill, a large-scale community in Gig Harbor that includes approximately 500 single-family homes and 500 multifamily residences, including Herons Key, a senior living community. The development also includes a YMCA, four city parks and Swiftwater Elementary School, with Harbor Christian Center planned as a future addition.

Raydient's remaining property at Harbor Hill is the 18-acre Village at Harbor Hill, a planned mixed-use area that the company says has been a priority for both Raydient and the surrounding community.

In North Kitsap, another Raydient property has generated a much more complex conversation. The 400-acre property formerly known as North Kitsap United, located east of Port Gamble, became the subject of a countywide debate over housing density, open space and future community uses.

Raydient sought a rezoning that would have allowed about 60 additional home sites while clustering development and preserving roughly 300 acres as open space. The proposal was ultimately denied by the county following significant public discussion.

Rose said the company accepted the decision and has continued exploring alternatives that could preserve much of the land while adding community amenities.

"With regards to North Kitsap United, we worked hard, put our best foot forward, and made our case," Rose said. "While we were disappointed with the decision to deny the rezone it was not ours to make. We accept that decision and will move forward constructively and collaboratively on whatever the future holds for the property."

The revised vision focuses on conservation and

The Hood Canal Vista Pavilion provides a waterfront setting for weddings and community events in Port Gamble.



Photo by Quinn Propst

community uses, including a potential YMCA and youth sports facilities that could serve families throughout North Kitsap while complementing nearby trails and open space.

"The most controversial rezone element was the potential increase in the number of residences," Rose said. "As an alternative we've prepared a site plan showing no residences to illustrate that possibility."

The company is also exploring conservation-based options for the property.

"The good news is that the company is willing to work with the community to explore purchase options," Rose said. "We conducted a multi-organization meeting at the end of 2025 to explore fundraising ideas and hope to have more news on that soon."

For Rose, the long-term goal is consistent across Raydient's projects: creating communities where housing, recreation, education and conservation are interconnected.

"When I go back and look at the footprint we leave behind by the time I'm out of here, you've got this cool little college town, 5,000 acres of preserved forest, and then a YMCA and sports fields for kids," Rose said. "That's what the vision has been. That vision has been that way for 20 years."

The Port Gamble General Store remains a centerpiece of the historic village, welcoming residents and visitors.

Looking Ahead

Ask Rose what he wants a first-time visitor to see in 2035, and his answer returns to the idea of Port Gamble as a functioning community, not a museum or a gated enclave.

"I hope they see a community that feels knit together as a community," he said. "I hope they sit in the restaurant and hear people with different accents from all over the country and all over the world."

He wants the town to welcome longtime residents, newcomers and tribal families whose history is woven into Port Gamble's story.

"You'll come back to a place where the original founders still have a presence, and that's the tribe," he said. "That's a goal of mine – to make this a comfortable, welcoming place for everybody, especially that group of families." In an era when many historic company towns either ossify into static museum pieces or vanish beneath waves of undistinguished development, Olympic Property Group's experiment at Port Gamble is a gamble of its own: that a place can grow and change in ways that honor its past, sustain its environment, and still make sense as a business.

"You've got to dream crazy big," Rose said. "And if you get half of that, it's going to be the most amazing place." ■



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

What Do You Hope To Build Here?

A reflection on the values that shape Kitsap – and the future we're building together.

By Gabe Jacobs | Founder, Prescient Communications

Last month, standing before a room of business, government, and community leaders from Bainbridge Island and across the Kitsap Peninsula, I asked a question:

As we look to the future, what do we want Kitsap to be known for?

While facilitating the conversation for the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance (KEDA), I heard a variety of thoughtful perspectives on what Kitsap could – and should – become. Words like "livability," "opportunity," "sustainability," and "growth" resonated throughout the room.

The discussion stayed with me long after it ended, and I found myself reflecting on what this community has come to mean to me personally.

Five years ago this month, my family and I made Kitsap our home. After spending the pandemic in a small Seattle apartment, we moved to Poulsbo in July 2021 in search of a better life for our four-year-old son as he prepared to start kindergarten.

Not long after, I left my job at a global public relations agency to launch a boutique communications consultancy focused on helping purpose-driven organizations create positive change. After spending two decades leading communications campaigns for Microsoft, the Gates Foundation, Harvard University, and other large organizations, I began supporting smaller nonprofits, social enterprises, and public programs in the very

community where I live.

None of that would have been possible without this community. What I've come to realize is that Kitsap isn't defined by a single industry, institution, or group of people, but by the values we share.



We're a Community of Builders

Seattle is a place of ideas. Kitsap is a place where things get made.

From the Navy and shipyard to advanced manufacturers, marine technology firms, and local food producers, this is a place where people turn ideas into reality.

We design, develop, test, and improve the things that matter – often strengthening our community in the process.

We're a Place of Connection

Kitsap is defined by convergence. Urban and rural, land and sea, military and civilian, longtime residents and newcomers. We're a diverse community at the intersection of industries, lifestyles, and cultures – a place where different worlds come together and new possibilities emerge.

We're Committed to Purpose

This community is guided by a sense of mission. From the Tribal members who lead efforts to preserve the lands and waterways, to Naval personnel who protect our country, the health workers who care for our families, and educators who expand our opportunities for the future, service runs

deep here. We care for our own. Yet the work happening here often reaches far beyond county lines.

We're Driven by Possibility

Finally, Kitsap, to me, is a place of reinvention – a community defined by new beginnings.

Whether you're a Seattle professional searching for a better quality of life, a former servicemember pursuing a new calling, or a retiree eager to become more engaged, Kitsap is where you can write your next chapter.

I know, because it did that for me.

What started as a move to create a better life for my family turned into an opportunity to reimagine what I want to create in the world. Here, I found the inspiration to build, the space to connect, and the confidence to pursue the things I care about.

And while my story is just one of many, I suspect I'm not alone.

So, as we look to the future, perhaps the question isn't simply what we want Kitsap to be known for.

Perhaps it's this: *What do we hope to build here?*

And if we're fortunate enough to help shape that future, then it's on us to ensure that Kitsap remains a place where people have the opportunity to not only make a living – but build a life. ■



Working Together to Welcome the World to Kitsap

The Greater Kitsap Chamber & Visitor Center and Visit Kitsap Peninsula partner to enhance visitor services and strengthen local tourism

The Greater Kitsap Chamber & Visitor Center (GKCVC) and Visit Kitsap Peninsula (VKP) are excited to announce a one-year partnership for 2026 designed to better coordinate tourism marketing, visitor services, business support,

groups sales, and visitor data across Kitsap County.

The partnership is designed to help Kitsap welcome more visitors, encourage overnight stays, support local businesses, and prepare for increased regional and international travel.

This is not a merger. Both



Aljollynn Sperber & Irene Moyer

organizations will remain separate non-profits with their own boards, staff, finances, and missions. This partnership is a formal, time-bound partnership focused on clearer coordination, stronger accountability, and better service for visitors, businesses, and communities across Kitsap County.

For many years, both organizations have supported Kitsap's visitor economy, often working towards similar goals from different places. VKP has focused on destination marketing, overnight stays, group sales, tourism development, and visitor data. GKCVC has focused on welcoming visitors, supporting local businesses, operating visitor centers, and creating community programs and events.

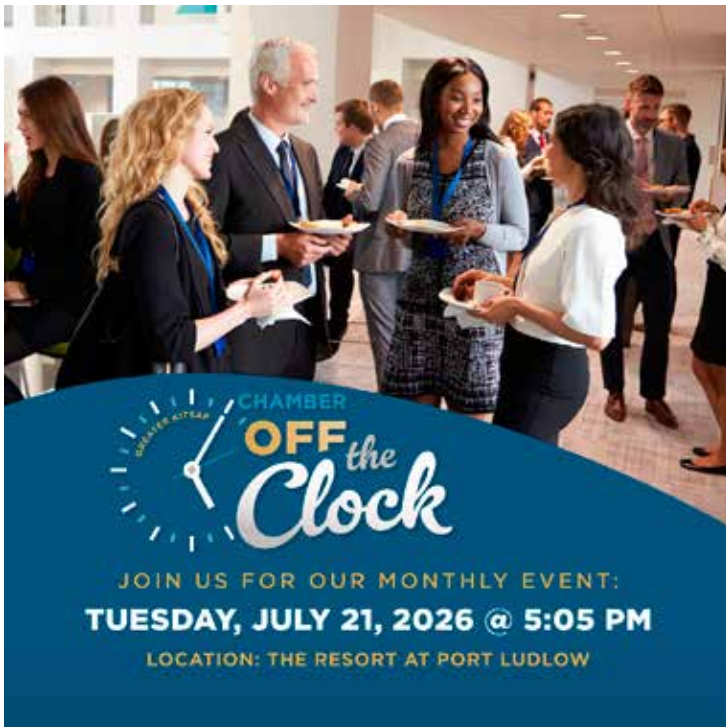
Because the organizations have worked in parallel, there have been areas of overlap, duplicated effort, and missed chances to coordinate more closely. This partnership brings those efforts into better alignment so Kitsap can offer a clearer, more welcoming

experience for visitors and stronger support for local businesses.

"Tourism works best when the full visitor experience feels connected," said Aljollynn Sperber, Executive Director for VKP. "This partnership helps connect marketing, visitor services, lodging coordination, business readiness, and data so visitors have a better experience and local communities benefit."

"The Greater Kitsap Chamber & Visitor Center has always played an important role in welcoming visitors and connecting them to the local community, whether it be with local businesses and attractions or events designed to show visitors the unique experience and flavor that Kitsap has to offer," said Irene Moyer, President & CEO.

"This more formalized partnership with Visit Kitsap Peninsula strengthens that work by aligning visitor services with countywide destination marketing and group sales - helping visitors stay longer, spend more, and return." ■



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GKC Around the Community

May Chamber: Off the Clock

May brought lots of familiar and new faces to the Chamber's monthly after-hours networking event. Thank you, BC Fitness Studio, for hosting and creating such a welcoming space for connection and conversation among our business community. Also, special shoutout to Honeybee Horticulture for always providing the most delicious treats. ■



Amazing charcuterie boards courtesy of Honeybee Horticulture.

Bremerton Fan Zone Visitor Center Information Booth

Summer festivities were in full swing at Quincy Square, and the Greater Kitsap Chamber & Visitor Center

were delighted to join the celebration by hosting a visitor booth during the Bremerton Fan Zone watch parties. ■



Our business members enjoying after hours at BC Fitness Studio.

Roxyette Ribbon Cutting

June 12th not only signified the start of Bremerton Fan Zone activities, but the grand opening of the Roxy Theatre's renovated concession stand: the Roxyette. Heralding back to the theatre's original design, the Roxyette marks the Roxy's completion in their long-awaited building restoration. Those gathered could join the celebration with free popcorn and an opportunity to watch the game in the shade. ■



Chamber Board Director, John Morrissey along with Michael Goodnow, Executive Director of the Roxy Theatre Foundation.



Chamber and Roxy members cut the ribbon for the Roxyette's grand opening.

Port-to-Port Pop-Up Ferry



On June 13th, the Greater Kitsap Chamber kicked off the summer with the return of the Port-to-Port Pop-Up Ferry.

Designed to help launch summer activities around the County, including the Bremerton



Fan Zone and Quincy Square activations, the special one-day sailing allowed visitors sailing between Silverdale and Bremerton to enjoy the beautiful views between the two local ports aboard the last of the Mosquito Fleet boats, the Carlisle II.

Paired with unseasonably warm weather, guests were able to spot a gray whale near Bremerton throughout most of the day.

Ferry riders had the opportunity to explore all that

Silverdale and Bremerton had to offer, including the Juneteenth Freedom Festival and the Pre-Father's Day Car Show.

In Silverdale, a complimentary shuttle took ferry goers to and from the Kitsap Mall for those looking for additional shopping and dining.

Special thanks to Kitsap Transit and their crew, as well as the Port of Silverdale's security team for all their help during the day and the many Chamber and community volunteers who helped host throughout the day. ■



The historic ferry, Carlisle II, sailing towards the Port of Silverdale.



June Member of the Month

The Greater Kitsap Chamber is pleased to name valueGlass as our June Member of the Month.

Since opening in 2014, valueGlass has earned a reputation for delivering high-quality glass solutions with professionalism and care across Kitsap County.

Their attention to detail, reliable service, and relationship-driven approach have made them a respected and recognizable part of our local business landscape.

Since joining the Chamber in 2024, they have remained actively engaged and committed to supporting both fellow members and the broader community.

A Continued Commitment to Community

valueGlass demonstrates its community-minded spirit through ongoing participation in



local events, including Military Appreciation Day and Armed Forces Day.

Their involvement reflects an appreciation for the people and partnerships that make Kitsap County strong, and a willingness to consistently show up in support of the community.

Strengthening Our Local Business Network

Beyond their participation in local events, valueGlass contributes to the success of other small businesses.

Most recently, they donated



and installed a new glass door for a fellow Chamber member – an act that speaks to their collaborative mindset and generosity.

By investing in their peers, they help create opportunities for shared success and reinforce the strength of our local economy.

A Clear Commitment to Craft and Community

valueGlass stands out for

its commitment to quality workmanship and meaningful community engagement.

Their focus on delivering excellent results while building lasting partnerships reflects the values we celebrate within the Chamber.

We are proud to recognize valueGlass for their continued contributions and look forward to seeing their ongoing impact in Kitsap County. ■

May Membership Luncheon – State of the Base

May marked the Chamber's annual, month-long celebration of the Armed Forces community in Kitsap. To conclude the festivities, we welcomed Captain Alexander Baerg, Commanding Officer of Naval Base Kitsap, to our May Membership Luncheon. We would like to thank Captain Baerg for his leadership and taking the time to speak directly with our membership.

We also had the honor of recognizing our 2026 Ambassador Scholarship recipients: Logan Malnar, Keaton Martinez, Quincy John Robinson Jr., Evelyn Bevers, and Deijah Diego.

A special thank you to the Bremerton-Olympic Peninsula Council of the Navy League and the East Bremerton Rotary Club for their generous support, sponsoring three and two scholarships, respectively. ■



Members of the Navy League and East Bremerton Rotary Club with the 2026 Ambassador Scholarship Recipients (left to right: Deijah Diego, Evelyn Bevers, Quincy John Robinson Jr., Logan Malnar, and Keaton Martinez).



New and Renewal Memberships for May

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

Growth

Cascade Natural Gas
Commercial and Industrial
Program (2025)
Pin Seeker Indoor Golf (2024)

Main Street

1st Security Bank (2018)
Astound Business
Solutions (2017)
Bay Pointe Marine Courte
Retirement Community (2022)
Navy Federal Credit Union (2001)
Sound Publishing (1989)

Business

618 Auto Repair (2026)
Boys & Girls Clubs of South
Puget Sound (2013)
Edward Jones (2024)
Grand Canyon University (2022)
Help Desk Cavalry LLC (2016)

Hill Worldwide Moving
Services (2013)

**JI Design & Marketing
LLC (2026)**

Liberty Bank (2011)
My Printing Services (2014)
Our Place Pub & Eatery (1984)
Peninsula Construction Services,
LLC (2023)

**Rail and Sail Vacations
(2026)**

Realty Station Inc. (2016)

Serengeti Care (2026)

**Sound Accounting &
Advisory (2026)**

Suquamish Museum (2026)

Team Luxe Real Estate (2023)
Tiffany Diamond Photography
(2021)

Vibe Coworks (2021)

WA Fed Bank (2023)

**Zen Dragon Martial Arts
(2026)**

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.

Stop Chasing Leads. Start Building Demand

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

I was recently talking with a business owner who told me they had allocated their entire marketing budget to Google Business. It wasn't an unusual conversation. In fact, I hear some version of it quite often. The thinking is simple: "That's where people are searching, so that's where I should spend my money."

I could understand why they thought that way. After all, most of us use Google to search for products and services every day. But relying on Google alone is like waiting at the finish line without ever inviting anyone to join the race. Google is one of the last steps in the buying journey, not the first.

Understanding the Sales Funnel

Think of marketing as filling a sales funnel. Every new person who learns about your business enters at the top. As they move through the buying process, some lose interest, some choose a competitor, and some eventually become customers. If you're only focused on the bottom of the funnel, you're constantly waiting for people who are already ready to buy instead of creating new demand at the top.

Create Awareness

The top of the funnel is the people who don't know your business yet. So how do you get them to know you?

- Community involvement
- Local publications
- Display advertising

- Social media
- Sponsorships
- Content

Build Confidence

The middle of the funnel is the people who are comparing options.

- They've heard your name before.
- They're reading reviews.
- Visiting your website.
- Talking to friends.

Capture Demand

The bottom of the funnel is where they are ready to buy. This is where you have captured the demand. This can be the Google Search. Google helps capture existing demand. It rarely creates it.

Why Bottom of Funnel Marketing Is So Expensive

Here's the challenge.

When someone searches "roofing contractor near me" or "CPA in Kitsap," every competitor is fighting for the same customer.

Every click becomes more expensive because businesses are bidding against one another for the same customer. The more competitive the industry, the higher the cost of acquiring each lead.

If the customer has never heard of your business before, you're competing almost entirely on price, reviews, and luck.

That's an expensive place to start.



Build Demand Before Customers Search

Here's where the opportunity is.

People naturally choose businesses they recognize.

If they've seen your company:

- in print media
- sponsoring a community event
- supporting a local nonprofit
- on social media
- in targeted digital advertising ...your name already feels familiar.

By the time they search, you've already won half the battle.

Recognition Builds Trust

People don't buy from strangers if they have another option.

Marketing isn't just about generating clicks. It's about building familiarity by creating a brand that is recognizable and consistent.

We are all busy. Between work, family, emails, texts, and endless to-do lists, we don't

have time to research every business from scratch. When you need a roofer after the storm, you're more likely to call the company whose name you recognize than one you've never heard of. Familiarity creates trust, and trust influences buying decisions.

The Best Marketing Strategy Uses Both

This isn't an argument against Google. Google is important because people use it! But it is an argument against putting every dollar there (or in any single strategy).

A healthy marketing strategy should create demand while also capturing demand. One without the other is incomplete.

The businesses that are growing and moving forward aren't simply waiting for customers to search. They're making sure customers already know who they are before they ever open Google.

Bottom Line

The most successful businesses don't wait for customers to discover them. They make sure they're impossible to forget. Because the most valuable customer isn't always the one you convince. It's often the one who already knows your name. ■

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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The Ultimate Live 80s Tribute

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**JUNE 12
8 – 11 PM**

Recruitment

Are Your Interviews Measuring Talent, or Comfort?

By Monica Blackwood

President & CEO West Sound Workforce



What if your interview process is eliminating some of your best candidates before you ever recognize their potential?

Often, interviews are seen as an opportunity to identify the strongest person for the job. Yet they often measure something entirely different: a candidate's comfort level in an interview setting.

Those two things are not always the same.

The candidate who delivers polished answers thinks quickly on their feet, and projects confidence may not necessarily be the person who will perform best on the job. Likewise, the candidate who appears nervous, pauses before responding, or struggles to articulate their experience may possess exactly the skills, work ethic, and potential an organization needs.

In today's competitive labor market, that's an important distinction.

A recent experience in our office reinforced this reality.

A job seeker arrived for an interview with one of our recruiters. English was his second language. He understood English and could communicate effectively, but it quickly became apparent that he was working hard to process each question and formulate his responses. He appeared hesitant and somewhat tense, despite having the qualifications and experience required for the position.

Recognizing this, our recruiter

offered an alternative. A bilingual member of our team joined the conversation and asked whether he would be more comfortable discussing his experience in Spanish.

The change was immediate.

His posture relaxed. His answers became more detailed. His personality emerged. His accomplishments became easier to understand. The interview flowed naturally, and our team gained a much clearer picture of who he was as a candidate.

Nothing about his abilities had changed.

The only thing that changed was the amount of effort required to communicate them.

The experience highlighted something many employers rarely consider: translation is work.

For multilingual individuals, communication often involves a continuous mental process of listening, translating, organizing thoughts, and responding. Most do this well every day in their regular settings. However, an interview introduces another layer of pressure. Candidates are attempting to make a positive impression, recall examples, answer thoughtfully, and manage nerves while simultaneously processing language in real time.

Even highly proficient English speakers can find that exhausting.

The risk for employers is that they may unintentionally confuse communication style with competence.

A candidate who pauses before answering may be translating information rather than lacking knowledge. A candidate who appears reserved may be carefully selecting words rather than lacking confidence. A candidate who provides shorter responses may be managing cognitive workload rather than lacking experience.

In other words, what appears to be a weakness in an interview may have little connection to actual job performance.

This challenge extends far beyond language differences. Many candidates carry invisible barriers into the interview room. Introverts may need more time to process and respond. Neurodivergent individuals may communicate differently than hiring managers expect. Workers returning to the workforce may be rusty when discussing accomplishments. Younger candidates may have less experience interviewing, despite possessing strong skills and potential.

In each case, employers must ask an important question: Are we evaluating talent, or are we evaluating comfort?

That doesn't mean organizations should lower standards. Communication skills matter in many roles. Professionalism matters. The ability to collaborate matters. However, employers should ensure they are accurately measuring the competencies that truly drive success in the position.

Organizations facing talent shortages cannot afford to overlook qualified candidates because of barriers that have little bearing on job performance.

Fortunately, there are practical ways to improve the process.

Create an environment that reduces unnecessary stress. Set

expectations. Build rapport. Make interviews feel like conversations rather than interrogations:

- Allow candidates time to think before responding. Silence is not always a negative indicator. Sometimes it signals thoughtful processing.
- Focus on the substance of responses rather than presentation style alone. Consider what is being communicated, not just how it is delivered.
- When appropriate, provide language support through bilingual interviewers, interpreters, translated material or multilingual recruiting staff. Small adjustments can dramatically improve understanding and create a more accurate assessment of a candidate's capabilities.
- Most importantly, train interviewers to recognize the difference between communication barriers and capability gaps.

The strongest candidate may not be the fastest talker. The most effective employee may not be the person who delivers the most polished interview. The organizations that consistently attract great talent are often the ones willing to look beyond surface impressions. They understand that confidence and competence are not always the same thing.

Sometimes the right hire is simply carrying an extra layer of work that others cannot see. When employers recognize that distinction, they open the door to a broader, stronger, and often overlooked talent pool. ■

Monica Blackwood is the President and CEO of West Sound Workforce, a locally owned staffing firm serving employers and job seekers throughout the Puget Sound region. West Sound Workforce provides temporary, temp-to-hire, and direct-hire staffing services with a focus on alignment, performance, and long-term success.

Executive Q & A

Meet Joe Morrison, Executive Director of Kitsap Economic Development Alliance

By Quinn Propst

Ward Media Staff Reporter

From supporting entrepreneurs and attracting investment to helping shape the future of the region's workforce, Joe Morrison has spent his career focused on economic opportunity.

As executive director of the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance (KEDA), Morrison works at the intersection of business, government, education and community organizations to strengthen Kitsap County's economy. Since joining KEDA in 2020, he has helped guide the organization through a period of significant change, including the economic challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and continued growth across the county.

Morrison brings a background that spans marketing, finance, entrepreneurship and economic development. His work has included managing a \$12.7 million city-managed venture fund focused on investing in local entrepreneurs before taking on what he describes as his favorite role – leading KEDA.

In this Executive Q&A, Morrison discusses



Photo Courtesy of Olya Blase

Kitsap's economic outlook, the industries poised for growth, the importance of workforce development, the region's relationship with the U.S. Navy and his vision for how Kitsap can grow while preserving the qualities that make it unique.

Can you walk us through your career journey and what led you to

the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance?

I've had three career arcs. I started off in marketing and sales for credit unions. After that, I got an MBA.

My first job out of school was to run a \$12.7 million city-managed venture fund that invested in local entrepreneurs.

But my third role, and the one that's been



my absolute favorite, is managing KEDA.

Kitsap County has experienced significant growth and change in recent years. What do you see as the biggest opportunities shaping the region's economy right now?

I'm bullish on the Kitsap economy. Our primary economic driver has a positive

growth forecast – the US Navy. We also have unique assets in our community, like all the land that's up Highway 3, which we can use for future business opportunities. On this side of the water, we're insulated from the tech sector, which is good because it will likely face future turbulence due to AI and layoffs.

In general, the future just keeps getting brighter for Kitsap's economy in terms of growth and opportunity.

From your perspective, how has Kitsap evolved as a business community over the past decade?

I'd say that the COVID pandemic made distance from Seattle less relevant in terms of where people decide to both live and work. Kitsap is far more attractive to talent now, I'd say. When it comes to livability, that's what Kitsap is great at. We truly are a phenomenal community to live in.

What industries or sectors do you believe are positioned for the strongest growth in Kitsap over the next five to 10 years?

First, Defense: The US Navy pretty much has to invest in the Bremerton shipyard, which at this point is 134 years old, and needs a dry dock capable of servicing the new Ford class aircraft carrier.

Investment in that effort should be around \$10 billion or more, a big amount for a small community like ours. The Navy also has another significant facilities project to do out at Bangor Base in order to homeport the new, next-generation Columbia class submarines.

On the private sector side, we have a growing maritime industry here in Kitsap, with boat builders like SAFE Boats and Inventech Marine – and others – that sell boats not just in this region but throughout the nation and the world.

Healthcare is a future area of growth for Kitsap too, thanks to the \$600-million new facility that is St. Michael Medical Center in Silverdale. That's an anchor that draws more healthcare activity here. I would also point out that medical jobs are great careers for our residents.

I think there's also additional business

opportunity in the fields of construction, engineering and tourism. There's a lot for us to capitalize on in Kitsap, provided we lean into our strengths.

Workforce development continues to be a major topic across the region. What are employers telling you about their biggest hiring challenges?

A few years ago, we conducted listening sessions for long-term economic planning, and employers were all over the topic of workforce. Their concern was twofold: There aren't enough workers in Kitsap, and there aren't enough with the right qualifications.

As a result, KEDA made investments in this space, hiring Elizabeth Court last year to handle our workforce portfolio. She's doing a great job, working to increase the presence of former military personnel and their spouses in our workforce. She's also developing tactics to increase two-year certificated careers in our workforce by collaborating with schools and employers.

How important are entrepreneurship and small-business growth to the long-term success of Kitsap County?

They create the economy of Kitsap's future. I always like to point out the examples of

Joe Morrison speaks at the KEDA 2025 Fall Forum. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA



Executive Q & A

SAFE Boats and Inventech Marine. One entrepreneur co-founded both companies. Imagine if he didn't do that. Today, we'd have 400 fewer jobs in Kitsap, and a far less diverse economy.

Kitsap entrepreneurs have tended to stick around, so that means over time they've provided a lot of economic impact here. Think of Town and Country Markets, Rice Fergus Miller, Sage Manufacturing – these are just a few of the many companies started in Kitsap that employ so many of us today.

Housing affordability and infrastructure pressures are increasingly tied to economic development. How do those issues affect business recruitment, retention and workforce growth?

They're the underlying factors that determine what you can do with your local economy. Housing enables your workforce. If it's too expensive or scarce, you'll struggle to have employees.

Infrastructure, meanwhile, is the foundation of what businesses can accomplish: It enables creating goods, storing and shipping them, even having space to conduct business.

Kitsap's connection to the naval and defense economy remains a major economic driver. How do you see that relationship evolving in the years ahead?

Joe Morrison and Lillian Lockett Robertson, MD, executive director of the Marvin Williams Recreation Center, share a conversation during a community gathering. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA



Joe Morrison at the Annual Meeting-Economic Forecast 2026. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA

I'd really like to see increased collaboration with Naval Base Kitsap. It's not easy.

The Navy is behind a fence for a reason and they have their processes. They are good partners, but can be difficult to engage.

I can think of ways, with more collaboration, that we could have helped them secure the industrial space they continue to seek for the SIOP project more efficiently. We're still working on that, three years in.

Another example: I think it would really help transitioning servicemembers and their families find jobs if there was a WorkSource Employment Center directly located on Naval Base Kitsap, like there is at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

What role does regional collaboration play between local governments, schools, businesses and community organizations

in supporting economic development?

All of Kitsap's communities share the same basic economic challenges and opportunities: Childcare, housing, infrastructure availability, local business climate. KEDA brings together public, private and nonprofit sectors, tribal corporations, and educational institutions to work together to address these issues. KEDA is the convener to help get things done, align priorities and coordinate actions.

As more people relocate to Kitsap, how can the region continue growing while maintaining the quality of life that attracts residents in the first place?

It's worth remembering that Kitsap is growing according to plan, which is at about 1 percent population growth a year. True, some parts of Kitsap are growing very fast.

Panelists share their knowledge and answer questions at a KEDA entrepreneur panel. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA



Port Orchard is one of Washington's fastest growing cities. Still, in the last five years, we have exceeded 1% growth in Kitsap County just once. Since Kitsap is small and compact, any growth you see that happens here is very visible.

This is especially true when you're concentrating a lot of that growth in the same place.

The cities and county have coordinated on a good plan to preserve our green corridors and natural environment.

This plan, basically, is to see that Silverdale, Bremerton and Port Orchard take on most future growth and densify. This is happening, and will bring additional opportunity to those communities, like the potential for even more downtown redevelopment in Bremerton.

What accomplishments or projects are you most proud of during your time leading KEDA?

In general, I'm just proud of the organization, how hard everybody works and how much they care. We all love what we do, love working to grow our community's economy.

Last year we won an award for helping Booz Allen Hamilton move into Bremerton, which was a million-dollar-plus investment with significant job growth.

Last year we also facilitated a \$200,000 grant for Inventech Marine, which contributed to the construction of their new 60,000 square-foot headquarters located at the Port of Bremerton. We've also won awards for tech-forward environmental work – a tire-dump mapping project at the Port of



Attendees at the 2024 KEDA BIPOC Business Forum. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA

Ilahee with defense contractor SERCO – and for a shop local campaign.

But KEDA makes a difference all the time, with or without an award.

Today I just had a conversation that might help a local nonprofit connect to grant funding for an outdoor recreation campus. For the last four years, we've secured the capital for the Matchstick Lab Microbusiness Accelerator.

Local companies you know, your neighbors – Spread Supplies, Honey Malcom Winery, Indigo Plum – have been through that program and learned best practices from it.

When I was hired in 2020, it was the pandemic. I came into an organization that was working long days, processing



James Davis, KEDA Economic Development Manager, with Micah Bowers at Inventech Marine. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA



KEDA Board members tour Watson Furniture. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA

Executive Q & A

hundreds of grants for small businesses across the county, helping folks keep their doors open when things were scary and uncertain.

A few months later, a black business owner reached out to me and asked if we'd host a gathering for person-of-color owned businesses to focus on best practices, to gather and collaborate. That's how our BIPOC Business Forums were born.

There's a lot to love about the work that KEDA does.

Looking ahead, what does success for Kitsap County look like to you over the next decade?

Imagine a Kingston that's slightly more developed, family friendly, and with fewer vacant properties downtown.

Imagine a Bainbridge with far less bridge traffic, maybe a small company HQ or a couple high value startups. Imagine actual development on Olhava in Poulsbo, with cross-pollination between Western Washington University and Olympic College, more students milling around, and new buildings flanking the recreation center built there.

Imagine a Silverdale that sees ambitious redevelopment, that somehow transforms this big box city into a more livable community with its own identity. Imagine a Silverdale that actually capitalizes on its remarkable natural environment of Dyes Inlet, all while remaining a retail and medical powerhouse.

Imagine a thriving downtown Bremerton,



Presenters and Panelists at the 2024 KEDA BIPOC Business Forum. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA

with more pedestrian activity and no derelict buildings.

Imagine Port Orchard with a revitalized downtown that shows off its waterfront location, with a new community center, and that emerges into its own with increased business and restaurants that go along with that growth. Imagine more opportunity for jobs along the Highway 3 corridor from Belfair to Gorst, with firms coming to the area, taking advantage of new buildings in a shining business park, all while the airport carefully experiments with limited passenger service.

One thing I think all of us generally agree on as a community is that Kitsap's natural beauty, waterfront nature and green corridors are critical. There's a reason we live here and not on the I-5 corridor.

Valuing and preserving this environment makes us different from the rest of Greater

Seattle.

But we can't stand in place or freeze time. You either pursue growth and investments that benefit your community, or you let growth happen to you. Better we shape that growth and use it to our ends, benefiting our economy and residents.

Here in Kitsap we're great at collaboration so let's team up and realize some of these ambitions.

Kitsap is one of the most beautiful, remarkable places in America. It deserves an equally stunning economy. There is so much opportunity available to us right now. Kitsap's future is bright, so let's go realize some of it. You're welcome to help. Reach out to me directly if you'd like to get involved (morrison@kitsapeda.org).

KEDA's role is to facilitate jobs and investment, for all the places and people who call Kitsap home. ■

Joe Morrison, Shawn Gilfedder and Rion Ramirez speak at a KEDA event. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA



KEDA board member Roger Newton hands out awards to the 2026 KEDA Economic Champions. Photo by Debbie Gilman, Courtesy of KEDA



Personal Development

Playing the Long Game

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

It was July 1976. I was 11 years old and had just finished 5th grade at Olympic View Elementary in Oak Harbor, WA. The nation had just celebrated our bicentennial – 200 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. And like most kids my age, I loved to listen to music.

Prior to 1976, I listened to my vinyl records on my record player (nobody called it a turntable). But about that time, I purchased my first cassette tape. It was Fly Like an Eagle by the Steve Miller Band. I knew at that point, vinyl was dead and cassettes were the new order.

(Little did I know that 50 years later I would be buying vinyl records again and wishing I had kept my old ones!)

That switch from vinyl to cassettes was just a foreshadowing of what was coming. By the early 1980s, cassettes were being replaced by compact discs. In 1999, Napster launched, MP3 downloads exploded, and the music industry was turned upside down. In 2003, iTunes brought legal digital downloads – individual songs for \$0.99. A decade later, streaming became the dominant model and subscription replaced purchase entirely.

Today, we can listen to any song from any era on a device that would have looked like something out of a Dick Tracy comic strip.

In a world history full of industrial and cultural revolutions, that 50-year timeline may be the most compressed before AI.

It was only about three years ago that most of us even learned what ChatGPT was. It seemed remarkable then, but that version is already obsolete. Today, AI platforms are emerging constantly. What took the music

distribution industry 50 years to evolve was likely compressed into less than a year with AI.

Imagine what AI will look like in three years. Or ten. Or fifty, when my grandchildren will be nearly my age. That may feel unsettling. But the opportunity it creates will exceed any revolution the world has previously experienced.

If there's one thing we should have learned from the pandemic six years ago, it's that human connection is vital. When we couldn't engage with each other, we pivoted, finding new and creative ways not only to stay connected, but to expand our community to the world. And while we largely returned to what life looked like before, that expansion never fully contracted.

Now the worry is that AI will take jobs, replace people, and render us obsolete. Unlike 8-track tapes, that won't happen – if we recognize that we now have a greater opportunity than ever to invest in what will never go out of style: human community.

As we become more entrenched globally in artificial intelligence, the need for human engagement – professionally and personally – only grows. What do I mean by community? I mean neighborhood picnics, service club meetings, business networking groups, and nonprofit charity events. Ballgames and golf rounds, mentoring kids and volunteering at soup kitchens.

And yes, using technology to connect face-to-face with family, friends, and

business clients all over the world.

AI helps us do that. Greater efficiency, used wisely, creates more time for each other.

Business has always been about relationships. That will never change. Meeting over coffee or lunch, getting to know people both professionally and personally – that has always led to business. Imagine what happens when we actually have more time to do it.

As I write this, I've been dealing with a lingering cough. As I often do, I turned to

Claude for research, asking it to channel the world's greatest doctor. I used that information and collaborated with my doctor's office via text (not an option in 1976). After a few days without improvement, Claude suggested I talk to my pharmacist, noting that these professionals are often underutilized and deeply knowledgeable. I took that advice and talked to the human expert.

We are living through likely the greatest industrial and cultural revolution of our lifetimes. We can fear it and retreat to our cassette tapes, or we can blend and balance AI and HI – human interaction – to build community and improve our lives, our businesses, and our relationships.

AI is the new cassette tape – powerful, disruptive, and eventually replaced by something we can't yet imagine. Human connection is the vinyl. It came back because nothing else could replace it.

Invest accordingly. ■





Wander & Forage

For Katie DeLorme and Jon Snook, Wander & Forage was never meant to be just another retail store. It represents years of work, a passion for animal welfare, and a belief that business can be a force for good.

The Kingston couple's journey began early on through international animal rescue efforts. Their experiences abroad inspired them to work with World Animal Guardians, a nonprofit dedicated to rescuing dogs and cats from extremely volatile situations. Katie now serves as the executive director and continues the mission to help them find safe, loving homes.

That mission is at the heart of Wander & Forage. Since opening in downtown Kingston, the shop has earned attention for its imaginative interior, inviting atmosphere, and unique blend of retail and community space. Visitors often stop in for the dog and cat-focused products, but many stay to enjoy the welcoming environment Katie and Jon intentionally created.

Today, Wander & Forage has expanded beyond pet products to offer thoughtfully curated goods for dog and cat lovers, outdoor enthusiasts, travelers, and anyone who appreciates an adventurous lifestyle. Every item reflects the couple's values of exploration, connection, and compassion.

Most importantly, purchases help support international dog rescue efforts, turning everyday shopping into meaningful impact. For Katie and Jon, Wander & Forage is more than a store – it's an extension of a mission that began with helping one dog and has since grown into helping many more around the world. ■

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Real Estate

Tourism, Hospitality & Recreation

Driving Real Estate Growth in Kitsap County

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

Nestled between the waters of Puget Sound and the forests of the Pacific Northwest, Kitsap County has long been known for its scenic beauty, maritime heritage, and small-town charm. Today, however, tourism, hospitality, and recreation are doing more than attracting visitors – they are playing a significant role in shaping the county's real estate market and economic future.

As travelers continue to seek authentic destinations that offer outdoor adventure, waterfront experiences, and community-centered living, Kitsap County has emerged as one of Washington State's most desirable places to visit, invest, and call home.

A Destination with Growing Appeal

Kitsap County offers a unique blend of attractions that appeal to both tourists and prospective residents. Communities such as Poulsbo, Bainbridge Island, Bremerton, Port Orchard, and Silverdale each provide distinct experiences, from Scandinavian-inspired shopping districts to vibrant waterfronts, marinas, hiking trails, and cultural events.

Visitors are drawn to the region's accessibility. A short ferry ride from Seattle provides access to a lifestyle that feels worlds away from urban congestion. This convenience has fueled increased tourism while simultaneously introducing many visitors to the possibility of relocating to the area.

For real estate professionals, this phenomenon is well known. Many second-home buyers, retirees, and remote workers first discover Kitsap County as tourists before deciding to purchase property.

Tourism's Impact on Real Estate

The connection between tourism and real estate is becoming increasingly evident throughout the county.

Vacation rentals, waterfront homes, and investment properties continue to attract buyers looking to capitalize on the region's popularity. Short-term rental opportunities have

created new revenue streams for property owners, particularly in communities with strong visitor traffic such as Bainbridge Island, Poulsbo, and Port Orchard.

At the same time, demand for residential housing has grown as visitors experience the area's quality of life firsthand. Buyers are attracted by:

- Waterfront living opportunities.
- Walkable downtown districts
- Access to outdoor recreation
- Strong community atmosphere
- Proximity to Seattle and Tacoma
- Relatively affordable housing compared to larger metropolitan areas.

This influx of interest has contributed to continued demand for both existing homes and new construction developments.

Hospitality Fuels Economic Growth

The hospitality industry remains a critical component of Kitsap County's economy. Hotels, boutique inns, restaurants, breweries, wineries, and event venues create jobs, support local businesses, and attract investment.

Recent years have seen continued growth in hospitality-related development, including:

- New hotel projects
- Expanded marina facilities
- Waterfront dining destinations
- Event and conference spaces
- Mixed-use developments combining retail, lodging, and residential units.

Downtown Bremerton's revitalization serves as a prime example. Waterfront improvements, entertainment venues, and new residential developments have transformed the area into a destination for both visitors and residents.

Similarly, Poulsbo's historic downtown and Bainbridge Island's vibrant tourism sector continue to support surrounding property values and business growth.

Recreation as a Lifestyle Asset

Perhaps one of Kitsap County's greatest advantages is its abundance of recreational opportunities.

Residents and visitors enjoy year-round access to:

- Boating and sailing
- Kayaking and paddleboarding
- Hiking and mountain biking
- Fishing and crabbing
- Waterfront parks and beaches
- Golf courses
- Community festivals and events

These amenities have become increasingly important to today's homebuyers, who often prioritize lifestyle as much as location.

Developers have responded by incorporating recreation-oriented features into new communities, including trail systems, green spaces, community gathering areas, and easy access to outdoor activities.

The growing emphasis on health, wellness, and work-life balance has made recreation a powerful driver of housing demand.

Opportunities Ahead

As Kitsap County continues to grow, the relationship between tourism, hospitality, recreation, and real estate will only become stronger.

Future opportunities include:

- Expanded waterfront development
- New hospitality investments
- Destination-oriented mixed-use projects
- Recreation-focused residential communities
- Sustainable tourism initiatives
- Increased support for local businesses and entrepreneurs

Local leaders, developers, and business owners recognize that thoughtful growth is essential. Balancing economic development with environmental stewardship and community character will help ensure the county remains attractive to both visitors and residents.

Looking Forward

Tourism, hospitality, and recreation are no longer simply amenities that support Kitsap County's economy – they have become major influences on real estate investment, development, and community growth.

From bustling waterfronts and thriving downtown districts to scenic parks and recreational opportunities, Kitsap County offers a lifestyle that continues to attract visitors from around the world. For many, a visit becomes an investment, and an investment becomes a home. As the county continues to evolve, its greatest asset may remain what has always made it special: the ability to combine natural beauty, economic opportunity, and an exceptional quality of life into one remarkable destination. ■



Virginia Mason Franciscan Health Names Chad Melton Puget Sound Market President



After leading Virginia Mason Franciscan Health's Puget Sound operations in an interim capacity for the past year, Chad Melton has been appointed permanent president of the health system's Puget Sound Market, placing him in charge of one of Washington's largest regional health care networks.

Melton will oversee eight hospitals and medical centers and nearly 18,000 employees across the Puget Sound region, while continuing to build on operational and clinical improvements made during his tenure as interim market president.

His appointment comes after nearly five years as president of St. Michael Medical Center in Silverdale, where he has overseen significant expansion efforts designed to meet Kitsap County's rapidly growing demand for health care services.

"Chad is a proven leader who has already been instrumental in driving significant improvements across VMFH and our Puget Sound Market,"

said Julie Manas, president of Virginia Mason Franciscan Health and the Northwest Region of CommonSpirit Health.

"His commitment to quality, financial stewardship, and fostering a positive culture aligns with our values and our vision for the future."

During his interim leadership of the Puget Sound Market, Virginia Mason Franciscan Health reported improvements in clinical quality, patient experience and operational efficiency.

The health system earned top recognitions for clinical excellence from organizations including The Leapfrog Group, U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Hospital leaders also reported shorter patient lengths of stay, reductions in medically unnecessary hospital days and fewer patients leaving emergency departments before receiving care.

Among the system's most notable initiatives was the launch of Washington's

first combined emergency department and urgent care model, an approach intended to improve patient access while easing emergency room congestion. A second location was later opened in Port Orchard.

At St. Michael Medical Center, Melton has focused on expanding capacity and improving hospital operations.

He played a key role in planning and advancing a major expansion project that will add 74 inpatient beds to serve Kitsap County's growing population.

"I am honored and excited to officially step into the role of Puget Sound Market President," Melton said.

"I am proud of the progress we've made as a team over the past several years and eager to continue our collective work to enhance the health and well-being of the communities we serve."

Before joining Virginia Mason Franciscan Health in 2021, Melton served as chief executive officer of Fauquier Health, part of LifePoint Health

in Virginia.

He previously held executive leadership positions with LifePoint Health, LHP Hospital Group and Triad Hospitals.

Melton holds bachelor's and master's degrees in health care administration from Texas State University and serves on several community boards, including the Kitsap County Economic Development Alliance and the Washington Hospital Services Board.

Virginia Mason Franciscan Health also announced that Christopher Bredeson will become president of Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle effective June 29.

Bredeson joins the organization from EvergreenHealth, where he served as chief operating and strategy officer, after previously serving as president and chief operating officer of MultiCare Good Samaritan Hospital.

Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, part of CommonSpirit Health, operates 10 hospitals and approximately 300 care sites throughout the Puget Sound region.





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Changing Faces Changing Places

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

Kris Mihulka named CEO and president of Land Title Company

Land Title Company has promoted longtime executive Kris Mihulka to chief executive officer and president, recognizing a career that has spanned more than 40 years with the locally owned title and escrow company.

Mihulka joined Land Title Company in 1986 and has worked in every department during her tenure, building extensive experience in the title and escrow industry.

She was promoted to assistant manager in 1993,

became vice president and Kitsap County manager in 2012, and was named president in 2020. She now assumes the additional role of chief executive officer.

"Kris has consistently demonstrated the leadership, vision and dedication necessary to guide Land Title Company into the future," Board Chair Frank Leach said. "Having grown professionally with this organization for more than 40 years, she understands our business, our customers and our communities better than anyone."

As CEO and president, Mihulka will lead the



Kris Mihulka

company's continued focus on serving real estate professionals and consumers throughout Western

Washington while building on its longstanding commitment to community involvement.

"For the past 40 years, I have never imagined a better place to work," Mihulka said. "It is a tremendous honor to serve as CEO and president of this remarkable company. Together, we have built a reputation for excellence that spans generations, and I am excited to lead our company into the future."

Founded in 1968, Land Title Company provides title insurance, escrow and closing services for residential, commercial and land transactions throughout Kitsap and Mason counties.

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Timothy Tenbrink earns Certified Financial Planner designation

Parker Financial LLC announced that financial advisor Timothy Tenbrink has earned the Certified Financial Planner™ (CFP®) designation, a nationally recognized credential for financial planning professionals.

The CFP® certification is awarded by the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards after candidates complete extensive education requirements, gain professional experience, pass a comprehensive examination and agree to uphold strict ethical standards.

Tenbrink's achievement expands Parker Financial's ability to provide comprehensive retirement and wealth management services, including investment management, tax planning, asset allocation and wealth preservation strategies.

"We are incredibly proud of Tim for completing this rigorous milestone," said Jason Parker, president of Parker Financial LLC. "Tim's commitment to achieving the CFP® certification reflects his dedication to professional excellence and his continuous efforts to better serve our clients."

Tenbrink said earning the designation reinforces his commitment to providing clients with fiduciary-level advice and personalized retirement planning.

"I look forward to continuing to build deep, meaningful relationships and helping families navigate the

complexities of retirement with tailored, forward-thinking advice," he said.

Based in Silverdale, Parker Financial LLC is an independent, fee-based registered investment advisory firm specializing in retirement wealth management and comprehensive financial planning.

First Fed Bank names Chris Walsh chief banking officer

First Fed Bank has appointed Chris Walsh as chief banking officer, adding a veteran banking executive with more than four decades of leadership experience to its executive team.

In his new role, Walsh will oversee all banking operations as the Port Angeles-based institution continues its strategy of strengthening community banking services for businesses, consumers and local communities throughout Northwest Washington.

Walsh joins First Fed after serving in executive leadership positions at several financial institutions, including president and chief executive officer of Partners Bank of California and Sunwest Bank. He also previously served as chief banking officer at Vineyard Bank and Commercial Capital Bank, where he led growth initiatives, organizational development, acquisitions and banking operations.

"Chris is the kind of leader who combines deep banking expertise with a genuine commitment to people," First Fed President and CEO Curt Queyrouze said in announcing the appointment. "He has

repeatedly demonstrated an ability to develop strong teams, build meaningful relationships and lead organizations through growth and change while staying grounded in community banking principles."

Throughout his career, Walsh has focused on developing high-performing teams, strengthening customer service and guiding community banks through periods of expansion and transformation. He is also active in nonprofit leadership, having served with organizations including the Mission Hospital Foundation, the Boys & Girls Club of Capistrano Valley and the YMCA.

Walsh said he was drawn to First Fed because of its longstanding commitment to relationship banking and community service.

"For more than 100 years, First Fed has built a reputation not only for supporting its customers, communities and employees, but for going above and beyond what people typically expect of their bank," Walsh said.

Walsh holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

He is the second executive appointment announced by First Fed this year, following the hiring of Jennifer Gribble as chief people officer in March. ■

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Fishline Values

By Charlie Thompson | Executive Director Fishline

As the executive director of Fishline, I have a front row seat to the affordability crisis impacting all of us. Whether it's higher costs for food, a lack of affordable housing, rising medical costs or the price of gas; we all know that these are challenging times.

How do you lead when there is so much adversity in the world we live in?

For me, it is all about our values. At Fishline we have six core values that we aspire to: collaboration, compassion, integrity, innovation, resiliency, and commitment. Each one helps guide our decisions and how we show up each day to serve our community.

Valuing **collaboration** is more than just working together as Team Fishline. It means recognizing that we cannot do this work alone. We must engage with other organizations to meet the needs of our community. It means looking for ways to work with others to improve efficiency and allow more resources to go directly to those we serve. It also means we work with those in need to better understand their situation and come up with solutions together. Only by working together will we begin to dismantle the systemic issues that prevent us from thriving.

We approach our work with **compassion**. When someone new comes to Fishline for service, we recognize that it is extremely difficult to ask for help, especially the first time. That is why it is so important to approach the work with compassion. By seeing

each person as an individual and each situation as unique, we uphold the dignity that we all have and deserve.

Integrity means doing what we say we will do. It shapes how we show up for our community each day, grounded in service and support, and guides how we responsibly steward our resources to create conditions for people to thrive. At Fishline, we don't just state that we value

integrity – we demonstrate it by publishing our financial information on our website and conducting an external audit each year. This transparency helps our community feel confident that their support is used as intended to serve our neighbors. Integrity also motivates me to try new things, celebrate what works, and learn from what doesn't so we can continually improve.

We have a culture of constant improvement and that is why **innovation** is one of our core values. By constantly asking how we can do better, we are able to create dynamic solutions to better respond to our community's needs. That

is what is driving us to partner with the Great Peninsula Conservancy to grow fresh produce on two acres at the Petersen Farm. And to bring a mobile food market into neighborhoods that might otherwise struggle to access our free food market.

The need for our services is growing at an increasing rate. More people that never needed us are coming to us for assistance. When you meet people who are working hard but it is not enough, it can wear you down. That is where **resiliency** comes in. We show up each day to serve our community because we are resilient. We support one another in service to our community so that when you need us, we will be there.

Finally, our sixth core value is **commitment**. We are committed to serving our community; no matter what. Next year marks Fishline's 60th anniversary. We are busy planning for the next 60 years because we know how important it is that we continue to serve the community for as long as it takes. We have been here and we will continue to be here because we want everyone to thrive.

Whether you are someone who utilizes our services or someone who supports our mission, know that Team Fishline leads with our values of collaboration, compassion, integrity, innovation, resiliency, and commitment.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, Fishline is here to provide for basic needs in extraordinary ways.

Our Free Food Market is open to all Monday – Saturday from 10:00 – 5:00. To meet with a navigator and learn about other services, please visit our website:

www.fishlinehelps.org or call us at 360-779-5190. ■



Business Briefs

Lions foundation donates laptops to Olympic College students

The Bremerton Central Lions Charitable Foundation has donated 20 laptop computers valued at approximately \$7,100 to the Olympic College Foundation to support students in the college's Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program.

The laptops will provide eligible students with reliable technology for coursework, online learning and career preparation. The BFET program helps students receiving Basic Food Assistance continue their education while maintaining access to benefits such as childcare subsidies and

workforce training.

Foundation Treasurer Jeff Reynolds said supporting education is one way the organization can make a lasting impact in the community.

College officials said access to dependable technology can be a significant barrier for students balancing school, work and family responsibilities. Nursing graduate Sara Hewson said the donation will help students not only begin college but successfully complete their education.

Odessa Kawai, director of Olympic College's BFET program, said students are already signed up to receive the laptops, which will help them remain enrolled and succeed academically.

Wendy Coates, vice president

of development and community engagement at Olympic College and executive director of the Olympic College Foundation, said the gift represents an investment in the region's workforce by helping students earn credentials that lead to family-wage careers.

The Bremerton Central Lions Charitable Foundation has served the community for more than a century through charitable giving and volunteer service.

Poulsbo ranks among Washington's Most Trusted Business Owners

Poulsbo has earned recognition as one of Washington's most trusted business communities, ranking No. 97 nationally in a new survey examining where business

owners believe reputation and personal relationships still carry significant weight.

The ranking comes from a survey of 3,005 small business owners conducted by business financing company Advance Funds Network. Respondents were asked whether people in their community are more likely to do business based on a verbal agreement or handshake than through written contracts.

Poulsbo was one of only three Washington communities to make the national list, joining Walla Walla at No. 84 and Ellensburg at No. 143.

The report attributes Poulsbo's ranking to its strong local business relationships, citing the city's waterfront business district, Norwegian heritage, tourism economy and long-standing Kitsap connections as factors that help build trust among business owners and customers. According to the

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survey, reputation remains a key driver of commerce in communities where referrals and repeat business play an important role.

The survey also found that 85% of small business owners believe reputation spreads more quickly in smaller communities, while nearly one-quarter said previous business experience with someone is the most important factor in determining trust. Another 22% cited a person's reputation in the local community as the biggest reason they would be willing to do business with them.

Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe awards \$100,000 grant to Kitsap Regional Library Foundation

The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe has awarded a \$100,000 Community Investment Grant to the Kitsap Regional Library Foundation to expand literacy, learning and community programs throughout Kitsap County.

The grant, the first awarded through the tribe's 2026 Community Investment Grant Program, will support several library initiatives, including the Summer Learning program, efforts to build home libraries for children, student field trips to local library branches, and the system's Sharing Our Stories community reading initiative.

The award also highlights a unique partnership between the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe and Kitsap Regional Library that dates to 1974. The Little Boston branch, located on the Port Gamble S'Klallam Reservation, is one of only a handful of public library branches in the United States operating on tribal reservation land.

"We are profoundly grateful to the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe

for their extraordinary generosity and for a partnership that has strengthened Kitsap Regional Library for many years," said Wendy Kile, executive director of the Kitsap Regional Library Foundation.

Port Gamble S'Klallam Chairwoman Amber Caldera said the library has served generations of tribal members by providing educational opportunities and resources that benefit the broader community.

The Community Investment Grant Program, administered by the Port Gamble S'Klallam Foundation, was recently restructured to focus on fewer, larger grants that align with the tribe's long-term community priorities. Additional grant recipients for 2026 are expected to be announced later this year.

Olympic College students to receive free Kitsap Transit passes through pilot program

Olympic College students will be able to ride Kitsap Transit buses and local foot ferries free during the 2026-27 academic year through a new state-funded pilot program aimed at improving access to higher education.

The program is supported

by a \$200,000 one-time grant approved by the Washington Legislature to help Kitsap Transit and Olympic College test an affordable transit pass model for community college students. The free ORCA transit pass will be available beginning Sept. 1, ahead of the college's fall quarter, which starts Sept. 21.

College officials said students will be invited to complete a transportation survey and receive information on obtaining and using the pass. The pilot includes access to Kitsap Transit buses and local foot ferries but does not cover fast ferry service.

Olympic College President Dr. Chantae Recasner said reliable transportation is critical to student success, noting that transportation challenges often prevent students from attending classes.

The pilot comes as surveys continue to highlight

transportation as a significant barrier. In a Fall 2024 survey of 672 Olympic College students, 54% reported missing classes or campus activities because of transportation issues, while 87% of students who did not currently ride the bus said they would use public transit if it were free.

Kitsap Transit Executive Director John Clauson said the program is intended to expand access to education while helping identify a sustainable funding model for student transit passes.

Under the pilot, Kitsap Transit and Olympic College will track ridership and submit a report to the Washington Legislature by Jan. 30, 2027, evaluating the program's impact on student enrollment, attendance and long-term funding options. Highline College is participating in a similar pilot with King County Metro. ■





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Finance

A little known secret in life is this: “Memories pay dividends too.”

By Matt Augspurger | Wealth Advisor, Founder Strong Retirement Solutions®

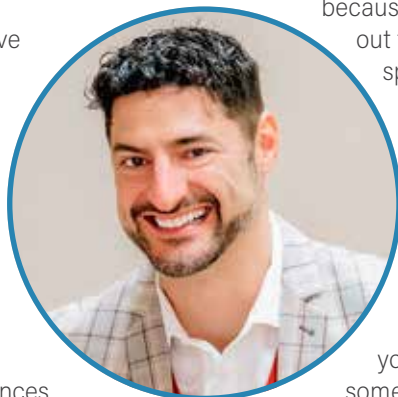
At 12 years old, my first job was in the cornfields of the Midwest pulling tassles out of corn stalks. Yes they pay kids to do that for seed corn operations! It was farm life at its finest, and by that I mean dirt on my hands, pollen in my nose, bugs in my eyes, and corn cuts all over my arms. (Interestingly, the same sharpness on the edges of reeds that we have at water's edge here in Kitsap, is the same biting edge of corn leaves.) I earned every penny of the \$2.95/hr that I got paid.

By the time I was 16 years old I was running a field crew and earning twice that... and it was time to buy my first car. The cost was \$700 and it was painful to pay that amount of money when I knew how much work it took to earn it.

That same emotion, but on a much larger scale, happens when you think about spending money on an experience when you've worked so hard to earn it and save it. Bill Perkins wrote a book titled "Die with Zero, Getting All You Can From Your Money and Your Life." And he talks specifically about the value of money AND the value of experiences. But why is

it important to have both?

It's important because summer is vacation time, and many people have a (often secret) dream list of places they'd like to go and experiences they'd love to have. And the vast majority of people put it off, and never do it, because it's expensive and it's hard to spend that money.



What are your dream travel spots? What are your secret-bucket-list-memories-to-be? A private suite at the Mariner's game? Backroom VIP winery tour? Three nights at the Post Hotel in Leavenworth or Fairmont Chateau on Lake Louise? Rent out the entire movie theater for your birthday? Sailboat tour around the San Juan Islands with a private chef? Great seats plus backstage passes to an amazing concert?

These things sound extra, unnecessary, expensive. And they sound that way because they are! You have to pull money out to make them happen. Money that's spent is not paying you dividends. But remember, a little known secret in life is this: Memories pay dividends too.

Sure you only have the experience once. But you keep the memory! And everytime you talk about the memory you relive it. Every Thanksgiving for decades you and the family will sit around and someone will say, "Hey remember when we... that was awesome." Memories pay dividends.

I have a client who was quietly content to continue his lifelong, good habit of saving, even in retirement. After a lot of conversations he realized recently that there is true value in experiences and so he and his wife started to travel. What do they travel for? Barbecue. BBQ all over the USA. And they LOVE it. They do one trip a year and talk all the time about the places they've tasted and the next place on the list. Another client who's parents took the whole family out on a week long mega-catamaran trip, the grandkids too! They mention that trip almost every time they see a sailboat cruising into Liberty Bay. There may come a time when these folks can't travel anymore BUT they will still be able to relive the memories and re-experience the joy of those adventures.

So make a list of "this sounds crazy" experiences, pick the one thing, plan for it, and do it. Travel well and invest in those memories. They pay dividends for life. ■

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