

KITSAP

August 2026

# BUSINESS

News | Features | Nonprofits | People

## Real Estate

Education, Workforce  
& the Future of Work  
in Kitsap County Real  
Estate

## Recruitment

Your Best Recruiter  
Isn't Your Recruiter.  
It's Your Reputation.

## The Ecosystem Edge

The Future Of Defense  
Is Being Built In Kitsap



GREATER  
KITSAP  
CHAMBER

Newsletter Inside

**Q & A**  
with  
**Capt. Alexander Baerg**

Commanding Officer, Naval Base Kitsap



*Leadership Kitsap Executive Director Carli Meurs (left) and Head of Marketing and Media Anjali LeGrand work from Leadership Kitsap's new office in Old Town Silverdale as the organization continues to expand its programs and community reach.*

*Photo by Leah Thompson/  
Scandia Studio*

# CONTENTS

**August 2026**

**Cover photography:** Courtesy of U.S. Navy

**Vol. 2 / No. 6**

## When Horses Can't Wait

Inside Kitsap's 24/7 Equine Hospital

Sound Equine Veterinary Hospital provides around-the-clock emergency, surgical and routine care for horses and farm animals across Western Puget Sound. From lifesaving colic surgery to mobile diagnostics and farm calls, the Poulsbo-based hospital is expanding its technology, expertise and reach to fill a critical gap in large-animal veterinary care.

## Rooted in Purpose, Rising in Service

How Leadership Kitsap Builds a Stronger Community

Leadership Kitsap has spent more than 30 years building a pipeline of prepared, community-minded leaders across business, government and nonprofit sectors. Through cross-sector learning, hands-on service projects and an expanding range of programs, the organization helps participants strengthen their leadership skills, build lasting connections and put those lessons to work throughout Kitsap County.

## Building Kitsap's Outdoor Economy,

One Adventure at a Time

For nearly four decades, Olympic Outdoor Center founder John Kuntz has turned Kitsap County's natural landscape into opportunities for adventure and economic growth. From building a garage-based kayak business to championing the Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail and helping grow outdoor tourism in Poulsbo and Port Gamble, Kuntz has built a business around connecting people with the region's greatest asset: the outdoors.

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# Your business is part of the story of this place

**E**very community tells a story. You can see parts of it in the obvious places. In the schools and neighborhoods. Along the waterfront. In the ferries moving back and forth across Puget Sound. In the shipyard, the military installations and the communities that have grown around them.

But you can also see it in the businesses we pass every day.

The coffee shop opening its doors before sunrise. The contractor whose trucks have become familiar sights around town. The restaurant where generations of families have celebrated birthdays and anniversaries. The small manufacturer tucked into an industrial park. The professional who left a larger company to finally build something of their own.

Together, these businesses help tell the story of Kitsap County.

Sometimes I think we underestimate that.

We tend to talk about business in numbers. Revenue. Jobs. Payroll. Sales. Growth.

Those numbers matter. They tell us something important about the health of an economy.

But they don't tell us everything.

They don't tell us about the teenager who gets a first job and learns how to show up on time, look someone in the eye and take responsibility.

They don't tell us about the business owner who quietly sponsors a youth sports team, donates to a school auction or writes a check when a local family needs help.

They don't tell us about the employee who has spent 20 years serving customers and now knows half the community by name.

And they don't tell us about the entrepreneur lying awake at 2 a.m. wondering how to make payroll, solve a problem or keep moving forward when things haven't gone according to plan.

Those stories are harder to measure.

But they matter.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to meet hundreds of business owners and entrepreneurs. Their industries may be different, but there is often something

remarkably similar about their stories.

Someone saw an opportunity.

Someone took a risk.

Someone believed they could build something.

And then they went to work.

Most businesses don't begin with a grand plan to shape a community. They begin because someone knows how to fix something, make something, serve someone or solve a problem.

But over time, something happens.

A business becomes part of a place.

Employees build careers there.

Customers develop relationships there.

Other businesses depend on it.

The owner joins a chamber, serves on a nonprofit board or mentors another entrepreneur.

A company that started with one person and an idea becomes woven into the fabric of the community.

That is why the story of a business is rarely just the story of a business.

It is part of the story of the place it calls home.

Here in Kitsap County, that story is especially interesting.

We are connected to Seattle and the broader Puget Sound economy,

yet our communities maintain distinct identities. Bremerton is different from Poulsbo. Bainbridge Island is different from Port Orchard. Silverdale is different from Kingston.

Each community has its own history, personality and rhythm.

And businesses help shape those identities.

They create gathering places. They restore old buildings and fill new ones. They bring people downtown. They introduce new ideas. They preserve traditions. They create jobs that allow people to build lives here.

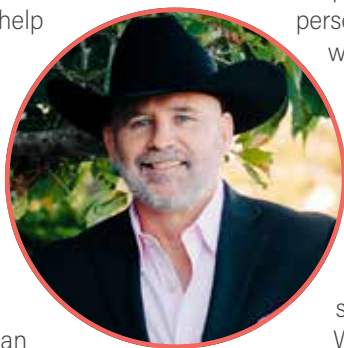
Sometimes they simply become landmarks.

You may not know the owner. You may never have thought much about the business itself.

But if it disappeared tomorrow, you would notice.

That tells us something.

One of the reasons we created Kitsap Business is because we believe these stories deserve to be told.



## Forward<sup>®</sup> THINKING

Not just stories about companies posting record numbers or announcing major expansions, although those are important.

We also want to tell the stories behind the businesses.

Why did someone start?

What nearly caused them to quit?

Who helped them along the way?

What have they learned?

What are they trying to build next?

Those questions often reveal far more than a balance sheet ever could.

They reveal people.

And ultimately, that is what every business story is about.

People willing to take risks. People creating opportunities for others. People trying, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing, to build something that lasts.

If you own or lead a business, it can be easy to become consumed by what is directly in front of you.

The next customer.

The next payroll.

The next problem.

The next deadline.

But every once in a while, it is worth looking beyond the daily demands and recognizing something larger.

Your business is leaving a mark.

The way you treat employees matters.

The way you serve customers matters.

The organizations you support matter.

The opportunities you create matter.

And the story you are building matters.

Because years from now, when people tell the story of Kitsap County during this period of growth and change, they won't tell it only through population numbers, development projects or economic statistics.

They will tell it through people.

Through places.

Through businesses.

Through the things we chose to build and the things we worked to preserve.

Whether you employ 500 people or work alone from a spare bedroom, you are contributing a few lines to that larger story.

Make them worth telling. ■

**Terry Ward**  
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## KITSAP BUSINESS

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# A Catalyst on the Waterfront

Port of Poulsbo Celebrates 75 Years of Economic Development, Stewardship and Community Connection

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Photos Courtesy of Olya Blase

**O**n a summer afternoon, the Port of Poulsbo looks like the picture-perfect small-town marina visitors expect: sailboats bob in Liberty Bay, kayakers glide past the breakwater and tourists stroll the docks before heading to Front Street. But behind the postcard setting is a public agency that does far more than manage boat slips.

The Port of Poulsbo is an economic development engine, a steward of the waterfront, a tourism driver and a partner helping shape the city's future.

"Ports are not just about marinas," Port of Poulsbo Executive Director James Weaver said. "They are really about bringing a community together, being a catalyst, and working together towards boosting the entire community."

As the port celebrates its 75th anniversary, Weaver is focused on expanding that mission. From attracting cruise ships and investing in marina infrastructure to protecting Liberty Bay and strengthening community partnerships, he sees the port not simply as a waterfront landlord, but as a catalyst for economic growth and quality of life.

"The Port of Poulsbo succeeds when our community succeeds. If our waterfront is vibrant, our businesses are thriving, our

maritime traditions are preserved, and visitors leave wanting to return, then we're fulfilling the mission entrusted to us seventy-five years ago," he said.

### A Small Government with a Big Mission

The Port of Poulsbo is a small municipal government with its own taxing authority and three elected commissioners, but Weaver sees its role as extending far beyond marina operations.

"We are essentially under a municipality type of organization," he said. "We really treat it as a collaborator. We are the catalyst between the private businesses, between the city, and between the nonprofits in the area, bringing things together, focusing funding, and making sure that our community can thrive."

That collaboration centers on economic development.

"Economic development is our biggest mission. That's what we do, and tourism is a big part of that in Poulsbo," Weaver said.

While many residents associate the port with recreational boating, it continues to support a working waterfront and commercial fishing fleet.

"We were initially founded as almost a commercial port. It was predominantly

gillnet and small fishing vessels back in the '50s," Weaver said. "It's been transitioning to a recreational marina ever since then, but we still have a very strong working waterfront that we maintain and support."

The port ensures commercial fishermen have access to the wharf for unloading and offloading while also balancing public access to the waterfront.

"Our citizens are number one. We are here solely for our citizens," Weaver said. "We always provide access to the waterfront. All these docks are open to the public... and then ensuring our commercial activity can continue, we really do everything we can to foster our fishermen."

### Expanding Tourism Opportunities

Tourism has become one of the clearest ways the port supports economic development. In 2024, the port completed a \$9 million breakwater project that transformed the marina's outer edge into a large-vessel facility.

"It was the biggest thing the port's done," Weaver said. "It has





❶ The Brass Kraken is among the downtown Poulsbo businesses that benefit from waterfront visitors drawn to the marina and tourism opportunities. ❷ A boater arrives at the Port of Poulsbo Marina, where updated infrastructure and long-range planning aim to meet the changing needs of future generations. ❸ The Port of Poulsbo's floating fuel facility serves boaters while the port plans future upgrades to relocate fuel tanks upland as part of a larger waterfront improvement project. ❹ Boats line the Port of Poulsbo Marina, a waterfront facility that has evolved from a commercial fishing hub into a destination for recreational boaters and visitors.



A view of downtown Poulsbo from the marina highlights the connection between the waterfront, local businesses and the community.

Port of Poulsbo Executive Director James Weaver is focused on expanding the port's role as a catalyst for economic growth, community partnerships and waterfront stewardship.



## Feature

now become kind of our premier large vessel facility."

The expansion has opened the door to negotiations with American Cruise Lines, which Weaver hopes will bring approximately 50 stops to Poulsbo next year.

"Most recently, we've been negotiating with American Cruise Lines to be the next stop of the small cruise ship tourism industry," he said. "We're looking to have about 50 stops next year at our breakwater, bringing people from all over the world."

Each ship carries roughly 200 to 300 passengers, creating new opportunities for downtown restaurants, shops and attractions without increasing demand for city parking.

"Bremerton did a great economic development impact study that showed that about every boater brings anywhere from \$100 to \$400 per person per day to the local economy," Weaver said. "Most of that's restaurants and bars and the activities on the waterfront, and so that's something that we contribute, bringing the cruise ship in."

"There's about 200 people per cruise ship spending money from all over the country and bringing it here to Poulsbo," he said, "and they're not parking cars."

### Creating Signature Experiences

Beyond cruise tourism, the port is investing in experiences that make Poulsbo unique among waterfront destinations.

"Creating a unique experience is kind of our focus," Weaver said. "If you look at travel, people are looking for a unique experience, and Poulsbo has that in spades. We're trying to elevate that even more."

The port works with businesses including Freedom Boat Club, which offers

fractional boat memberships, and Olympic Outdoor Center, which provides kayak and paddleboard rentals and guided tours.

These partnerships help connect visitors with the waterfront while supporting local businesses.

### Planning for the Future

As the port looks ahead, it is also preparing for changes in boating, technology and infrastructure needs. Its updated 10-year comprehensive plan outlines major capital investments, including replacing aging docks and adapting facilities for future boaters.

"Some of that includes upgrading our existing docks, which were built in the '90s," Weaver said. "Saltwater is very destructive on all these facilities, and it is incredibly costly to replace all these structures with the environmental requirements and permitting."

The boating industry itself is changing, requiring ports to rethink how they serve future generations.

"The business model is changing for boating," Weaver said. "Boaters are getting much older and older. It was a demographic that really tied itself with the boomers, and as they begin to retire, you're seeing less and less boaters, or it's polarizing to younger boaters with trailer boats, smaller boats, or

*A sailboat rests in the Port of Poulsbo Marina, where the waterfront serves both recreational boaters and the region's maritime community.*

*A Viking-inspired boat reflects Poulsbo's Norwegian heritage, which the Port of Poulsbo hopes to highlight in future waterfront improvements.*



*A great blue heron searches for its next meal along the docks at the Port of Poulsbo, where environmental stewardship remains a key part of the port's mission.*





combined into that," Weaver said. "It will be a very Norwegian-themed welcome, so that when you are approaching Poulsbo from the water, you are approaching it in a very unique way that is memorable."

The project is part of a broader effort to create a more welcoming waterfront experience.

"We pretty much pulled out all the stops to get the breakwater built and a new boat ramp, and did a number of capital facilities in the last five years," Weaver said. "We're in a rebuilding stage right now."

## Protecting Liberty Bay

Economic development is only part of the port's mission. Protecting the health of Liberty Bay remains a priority.

The port partners with the SEA Discovery Center and Western Washington University to support marine research, environmental education and public programs.

"They have a boathouse at our facility, and we set up intake lines and facilities to help them with fresh seawater coming into their tanks," Weaver said. "We do a lot of children's

programs together with them. They do testing on the docks that we work together on, and then they do a lot of interpretive and school program activities."

The port also helped secure funding for a Clean Vessel Act pump-out boat that provides free service to anchored and moored vessels in Liberty Bay, helping prevent sewage from entering the water.

"It keeps the bay from filling up with outfall from toilets and such on those vessels," Weaver said.

Another ongoing challenge is addressing derelict and abandoned vessels before they become environmental hazards. The port recently helped advance state legislation aimed at streamlining removal efforts while working with law enforcement and social service providers to address the needs of people living aboard those boats.

## Built on Relationships

Weaver's vision for Poulsbo's waterfront is shaped by decades of public service and maritime experience. Before joining the Port of Poulsbo nine months ago, he spent eight years with the Port of Bremerton overseeing the Port Orchard and Bremerton marinas. He previously served as a building official, planning director and county planner.

"My grandfather used to say, 'You can't know where you're going until you know where you've been,'" Weaver said.

That philosophy guides his approach to leadership today, emphasizing collaboration between government, businesses, nonprofits and residents.

"The city has been an amazing partner for the port, trying to work where government actually helps others," he said. "We support each other. We write letters for their projects and support their grants and their capital improvement projects, and they do the same for us."

The port's partners include the City of Poulsbo, Poulsbo Historical Society and Maritime Museum, Poulsbo Downtown Association, Sons of Norway, Rotary and other community organizations.

"Poulsbo has this unifying aspect that just binds us all together," Weaver said. "We're stewards here. We know that we are caring for something bigger than ourselves, and it's a big deal."

As the Port of Poulsbo looks toward its next 75 years, Weaver believes its responsibility remains the same as when it was founded: protecting public access to

the waterfront while helping the community prosper.

"Ports are catalysts for so much more," he said. "We focus on economic development and access to the water, but we are catalysts for so much more than that."

For those who have only driven past Poulsbo on Highway 305, Weaver has one final suggestion.

"They need to come visit Poulsbo on the waterfront if they never have," he said. "It's a gem here that not many people know about." ■



*The Port of Poulsbo's headquarters overlook Liberty Bay as the agency plans future improvements, including a new welcome center and port offices.*



*The Port of Poulsbo's marina provides public access to Liberty Bay while supporting economic development, tourism and maritime traditions.*

# POULSBO CHAMBER *Member Spotlights*

## SAVE THE DATE!



## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup>



Crimson Cove Smoked Specialties is a proud staple of Poulsbo! Family owned and operated, we deliver personalized service at our smokehouse and our online store. Smoked in our own smokehouse in Poulsbo, our smoked products are the best in Washington, with the northwest flavors of Alder and Apple in every bite.



The Animal Emergency & Specialty Center is dedicated to providing compassionate, advanced emergency and specialty veterinary care to pets throughout our community. We're grateful to have such a trusted resource in Poulsbo, keeping our furry family members healthy and cared for when they need it most.



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# Is the Future Workforce Already Here?

By Julie Piazza

SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights



If you're hiring in Kitsap County and convinced the local talent pool is simply too small, it may be time to look at the problem differently. The challenge isn't necessarily how many people live here. It's how many people are participating in the workforce. Kitsap has one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the Puget Sound region and the lowest share of employed women among neighboring counties.

That's not a story about a lack of capable people. It's a story about a workforce that hasn't been made fully accessible. For business leaders willing to rethink how work is structured, that represents a significant opportunity.

Consider who often sits outside the traditional labor force count: parents whose childcare costs make work difficult to justify, caregivers balancing family responsibilities, and retirees who still want to contribute but need flexible schedules. These aren't talent shortages. They're signs that workplaces were designed for a workforce that no longer reflects today's reality.

One overlooked group is Social Security recipients who are below full retirement age. Many want to remain active and engaged while keeping their earnings below annual benefit limits. Predictable part-time or seasonal roles can be an ideal fit, providing businesses with experienced, dependable workers while giving retirees the flexibility they need.

This highlights a broader shift in the labor market: flexibility is no longer a perk. It's infrastructure.

A company that offers only a traditional eight-to-five schedule may unintentionally

eliminate qualified candidates before they ever apply. Parents, caregivers, students, and others with competing responsibilities often need options that fit their lives.

When those options don't exist, they simply look elsewhere.

Fortunately, expanding access doesn't require a complete overhaul of operations, small changes can have an outsized impact. A childcare stipend or partnership with a local provider may help a qualified candidate enter or remain in the workforce. Flexible start times or compressed workweeks can open opportunities for caregivers who want full-time employment but need a different schedule. Return-to-work pathways can also help businesses retain experienced employees who need a gradual transition back after illness or family leave.

Another practical step is improving how jobs are designed and documented. Clearly defined duties make work easier to distribute among multiple employees, creating more staffing flexibility. When responsibilities are organized into specific tasks rather than broad role descriptions, businesses can more easily accommodate part-time schedules, shared positions, or temporary coverage during busy periods.

That foundation also supports a longer-term strategy: building a contingent talent pool. Rather than starting a hiring process every time demand spikes, businesses can maintain relationships with previously trained workers who are available for occasional shifts, seasonal needs, or temporary assignments. Parents,

retirees, students, and workers seeking supplemental income often welcome this kind of arrangement because it provides genuine flexibility. For employers, it creates a reliable source of talent already familiar with company expectations and procedures.

Business owners should think of these approaches less as accommodations and more as sourcing strategies. Most employers compete for the same visible group of active job seekers. Far fewer are reaching the much larger population of people who could work under the right circumstances but aren't participating in the workforce today.

Kitsap doesn't lack talent. It lacks access to talent.

The companies that rethink schedules, redesign roles, and create flexible pathways into employment won't just fill open positions. They'll gain access to an overlooked labor pool that competitors continue to ignore. In a labor market where finding workers remains a challenge, that may be one of the strongest competitive advantages available.

The first step doesn't have to be complicated. Take a fresh look at one position in your organization. Ask whether its schedule, responsibilities, or requirements are excluding qualified people who could succeed in the role. Talk with your employees about the barriers they've seen friends, family members, or former coworkers face when trying to return to work. Then test one small change, whether that's a flexible schedule, a part-time pathway, or a return-to-work option.

The future workforce may not be arriving someday. It may already be here, waiting for employers willing to build jobs that fit the people who call Kitsap home. ■

## Feature

# When Horses Can't Wait

## Inside Kitsap's 24/7 Equine Hospital

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

**O**n Caitlin Dorsey's first day as practice manager at Sound Equine Veterinary Hospital, there was no time for introductions.

"I walked in the door at 9 o'clock and everybody was just madly flipping our OR, getting [a horse] ready to go, getting him into surgery," she said. The patient was suffering from severe colic, a life-threatening emergency for horses. "Once everybody was done, they were like, 'Okay, we did it... we saved a life.'"

The experience offered an immediate glimpse into the pace and purpose of Sound Equine, the only full-service equine

hospital in Western Puget Sound. Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the Poulsbo hospital provides emergency, surgical and routine care for horses and farm animals across a massive swath of Western Washington.

"We are Western Puget Sound's only full-service equine hospital," Dorsey said. "We're also a 24/7 clinic. I have a doctor on call 24 hours, seven days a week, including holidays. So we are here and available, no matter what."

That around-the-clock availability is essential.

"Horses don't have timelines. They don't understand business



Licensed veterinary technician Hannah Gottstein loads a truck with equipment before heading out on a farm call.



Photos Courtesy of Olya Blase





*Sound Equine Veterinary Hospital in Poulsbo is the only full-service equine hospital in Western Puget Sound.*

hours," she said.

The hospital's seven veterinarians provide wellness care, dentistry, hospitalization, emergency and elective surgery, reproduction services, pre-purchase exams and care for farm animals including goats and cattle. At least one doctor remains in the hospital while others travel throughout the region making farm calls.

"We have a very large radius," Dorsey said. "We go all the way down to Lakebay. We service Forks every three months. We go across the Hood Canal Bridge two to three days a week, serving the Port Angeles, Sequim area. We have a very large territory."

For many horse owners, especially those

without trailers, bringing veterinary care directly to the farm is critical.

### **Growing Into a Regional Resource**

Sound Equine began as a small, two-doctor mixed-animal practice.

As demand for equine medicine increased, the practice expanded. A partnership with PetVet gave the hospital the financial backing to grow its staff and invest in new technology.

"By being able to partner with PetVet, it allowed us to have the backing to bring on more staff, as well as the backing to help buy better equipment, such as new surgical equipment," Dorsey said. "We just recently came into a LigaSure, so we can expand our surgery options now."

The advanced vessel-sealing device has opened the door to procedures the hospital previously couldn't perform.

"It now allows us to expand the amount of surgeries we're doing exponentially," she said. "Melanoma removals, mastectomies—all sorts of new surgeries that we haven't been able to offer, we can now offer."

Today, Sound Equine employs two boarded surgeons, an internal medicine specialist, a veterinarian dedicated to reproduction and another focused primarily on farm animals.

*Veterinarian Dr. Beau Green is part of Sound Equine's team providing emergency and routine care throughout Western Washington.*

## Feature

"We have tried to hit all of our bases here to make sure that we can provide excellent coverage in any aspect that anybody could be looking for," Dorsey said.

### Saving Lives Close to Home

Among the hospital's most significant services is emergency colic surgery.

"Being able to offer colic surgery is life-changing for horses," Dorsey said. "We can do an exploratory laparotomy, put the horse under general anesthesia, assess everything in the cavity, determine what's causing the pain, resolve the cause of colic, and then have your horse recover and go home. It literally saves lives."

Offering the procedure locally also spares owners from transporting critically ill horses several hours away.

"Being able to offer colic surgery here and not tell people that they have to haul out to Pilchuck (a veterinary hospital in Snohomish) ... is financially life-changing for clients," she said. "The cost of getting up there with gas prices, the cost of trailering, you have to take the ferry—and your horse is ill and you're transporting them as well. You're now stressing your horse out even more, trying to get them hours away for medical care."

In addition to colic surgery, the hospital performs arthroscopy, tenoscopy, sports medicine procedures, standing eye removals and specialized surgeries for farm animals.

"We're able to prolong a good life for them without them being in pain," Dorsey said.

### Taking the Hospital on the Road

Advances in portable technology have transformed field care.

"We have more resources available to us when we look at technology now, and the ability for us to have everything be portable is great," Dorsey said. "I have portable X-rays. I have a portable centrifuge, so I can literally take my whole clinic out into the field."

Portable diagnostics allow veterinarians to perform much of the same work at a client's farm that once required a hospital visit.

"We can do pretty much everything out in the field, which has increased our ability to service clients that can't haul in," she said.

### Serving a Diverse Equine Community

Despite Kitsap County's suburban reputation, the region supports a large horse population.

"Surprisingly, this is a big horse area. You wouldn't think

so, but especially as you get to some of the more rural areas—Seabeck, Belfair, across the bridge in the Chimacum and Sequim area—absolutely," Dorsey said.

The hospital serves everyone from backyard horse owners and hobby farms to competitive show barns, including Woodside Stables in Kingston and Bulrush on Bainbridge Island, where veterinarians hold regular on-site appointment days. Sound Equine also partners with rescue organizations including Horse Harbor and Pony Up Rescue.

"For some of these barns, we go out once a week and make sure that all their animals are well taken care of," Dorsey said. "We take care of their health certificates to get them in and out of shows to Canada and across the United States. We also recently added a lameness block so we can take care of lameness and sports medicine-related issues to make sure they're in the best shape they can be for their shows."

The hospital also fills a gap in emergency care for large animals.

"With small animals, there are still more options—you can go to emergency clinics, you can go to VCA," she said. "We're filling a big gap by being able to provide 24/7 care for larger animals that still need care."

### The People Behind the Practice

Providing that level of care requires more than advanced equipment.

"Vet medicine is one of the hardest areas to work in," Dorsey said. "It is emotionally draining. It is physically demanding—especially when you're working with big animals. The demand is constant for staff."

Burnout remains one of the profession's biggest challenges.

"We're constantly looking for staff to bring on," she said. "The burnout risk is really high."

Before joining Sound Equine, Dorsey spent seven years managing human physical

*Sound Equine's fully stocked farm-call vehicles allow veterinarians and technicians to bring advanced diagnostics and treatment directly to horses and other large animals.*



*A horse rests in one of Sound Equine Veterinary Hospital's outdoor stalls.*



*Practice Manager Caitlin Dorsey helps prepare a truck for the day's farm visits.*



*A horse receives treatment at the hospital.*



therapy clinics. She said leading an equine hospital still comes down to remaining calm under pressure.

"It really is just patience and being able to handle stressful situations calmly," she said. "You have owners who are under immense pressure to make decisions about their horse's medical care with very large price tags. It can become a very high-stress situation, and having to stay calm through all of that is very important."

She also believes leadership means pitching in wherever needed.

"I don't want to just sit in my office," she said. "I fill in at the front desk. I know how to schedule, how to bill. I've gone into the back and said, 'What do you need right now? Do you want me to clean a stall?' I will flip stalls, I will help hold a horse, I will walk a horse, and I will fill prescriptions."

"It has allowed me to see where the real pain points are that need to be fixed in a way that you don't get just from sitting in your office and hiding behind a computer screen," she said.

## Looking Ahead

Sound Equine plans to continue expanding its facilities and capabilities with additional stalls, isolation spaces and potentially a dedicated surgical building.

"Every time we buy a piece of equipment, we have to discuss what the financial payoff is," Dorsey said. "How is this going to pay off in the long run? It almost always does. By expanding our surgery abilities, we can increase our surgical load, and allow our boarded surgeons to focus more on sports medicine and surgery."

*Board-certified veterinary surgeon Dr. Mackenzie Adams specializes in advanced surgical care for horses and other large animals.*

That's where their hearts lie."

The hospital also continues investing in community outreach through educational seminars, social media and partnerships with local events.

"I'm looking to get us more involved with the rodeo," Dorsey said. "I don't want to put our financial backing behind any one particular person—we don't have favorites. We want to be able to help everybody, and I want to help us continue to grow."

For Dorsey, the work combines a lifelong love of animals with a team she enjoys coming to every day.

"I've always loved animals. I've never met an animal I don't love," she said. "The animal aspect of things is super helpful. It's hard to have a bad day when you get to work with animals every day."

"We have a really great team right now," she added. "Everybody is so willing to jump in and help when there's any need, and they do it with a good attitude. It makes coming to work enjoyable."

Those moments of teamwork matter most when a horse leaves the hospital healthy.

"We feel it deeply when anybody loses an animal here," Dorsey said. "And when they don't—when we get to see that horse make an incredible recovery—that's life-changing for them, and for us too." ■



*Dr. Mackenzie Adams and Dr. Brianna Bryan monitor a hospitalized patient at Sound Equine Veterinary Hospital.*



*Whimsey the donkey has become a favorite among staff and visitors at Sound Equine Veterinary Hospital.*



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# Senior Wellness

# Dignity by Design

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

The future of work in senior living is going through a massive shift. It is driven by the demographic rapidly aging and the severe labor shortages. The healthcare industry is leaning into advanced technology to reshape operations. Even caregiving is evolving. It used to be highly reactive and full of task-based functions but now is very proactive and technology-supported.

## The Shift in Demand and Demographic

There is an unmistakable shift in the global demographic landscape. The population of people that are ages 65 and up continue to increase whereas the population ages 80 and up are projected to skyrocket. On the other hand, the traditional pool of family caregivers that are typically adults aged 45 to 64 is increasingly significantly slower.

What the demographic projection means is that senior living communities and home care providers will have to adapt with the influx from the senior population and the decrease in family caregivers.

## Leaning On Technology

AI technology, robotics, and passive sensing technologies are stepping in to assist the workforce to mitigate the shortages. These innovative technologies are designed to make communities feel safer and more efficient:



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• **Robotics:** Assistive automation helps with routine tasks, mobility support, and monitoring. This is far from replacing human workers. Robotics handle physical and repetitive burdening tasks that free up the workforce to focus on genuine human connections.

## Evolving the Caregiver Role

The nature of caregiving jobs is shifting toward more meaningful and interpersonal work. Caregivers are now evolving into "care coordinators" and "relationship builders" who manage both human empathy and digital ecosystems. Because of this, upskilling and continuous learning is essential for caregivers. Senior care professionals of today and tomorrow need to be comfortable interpreting data from the sensors, troubleshooting assistive devices, and utilizing these new tools in their daily care workflows.

## Redesigning Retention

The workplace environment is aggressively changing to attract and retain the staff in a historically tight labor market. Leading senior living communities are recognizing the physical and emotional demands that are placed on caregivers and are upgrading

their back-of-house infrastructure. Modern designs feature:

- **Ergonomic Workspaces:** Thoughtful layouts that minimize physical strain and reduce caregiver fatigue.
- **Wellness and Respite Areas:** Designated break spaces filled with natural light, outdoor access, and there are some communities that offer on-site childcare to support employee mental and emotional well-being.

## The Growth in Compensation

Historically, the caregiving profession and support workers have been underpaid relative to the vital, demanding nature of their work. However, fierce market demand and increasing operational standards have led to a steady climb in wages, comprehensive healthcare benefits, and employer-sponsored training and certification. The increased demand for memory care and specialized programming has further accelerated the need for continuous professional development. Senior care careers are being professionalized and recognized as highly stable and emotionally rewarding career paths.

Ultimately, the future of work in the senior living industry is not about removing humans from the care equation but about leveraging technology to eliminate operational friction. The goal is to make the job physically safer and to create a work environment where compassionate professionals can focus entirely on relationship building and resident well-being.

The transformation of the senior living and caregiving profession is not merely an operational necessity, but a profound societal obligation. As the global demographic landscape moves permanently toward an older population, the healthcare industry must shed its outdated structural models and embrace a future where technology and humanity seamlessly coexist. By using predictive AI, we can eliminate physical burns through robotics. All the while, establish sustainable, well-compensated career pathways. We can finally elevate caregiving into the highly respected profession that it deserves to be. The success of this evolution will not be measured by the sophistication of the innovations used, but by the dignity, joy, and quality of life afforded to both the seniors receiving care and the dedicated professionals who provide it. ■







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## Feature

# Rooted in Purpose, Rising in Service

How Leadership Kitsap Builds a Stronger Community

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

**W**hen Executive Director Carli Meurs talks about Leadership Kitsap, her enthusiasm is unmistakable.

"Our purpose really is to empower people to do community work and to lead stronger," Meurs said. "We educate and empower leaders, and then connect them with other leaders who have the same mindset."

For more than 30 years, Leadership Kitsap has developed leaders across government, business and nonprofit sectors, building relationships that strengthen both organizations and the community.

### More Than Professional Development

Leadership Kitsap isn't a traditional leadership course.

"We're not industry-specific," Meurs said. "One of the things

that makes us so successful is that we cater to all people."

Its flagship 10-month program intentionally brings together participants from government, nonprofits, business, entrepreneurship, and more representing different ages, backgrounds and career stages.

"We have a ratio we work with to fill our cohorts—you can only have so much government, so much nonprofit, entrepreneur, and so on," Meurs explained. "The deep learning comes from working with people outside of your silo, outside of your industry, gathering each other's perspectives and maybe learning new communication styles."

Head of Marketing and Media Anjali LeGrand said that diversity strengthens both learning and representation.

"The more inclusion you have across industries, the more we want other people in



*Leadership Kitsap Executive Director Carli Meurs (left) and Head of Marketing and Media Anjali LeGrand help guide programs that educate, prepare and connect leaders throughout Kitsap County. Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio*





the community to see themselves in their leaders," LeGrand said. "We want people of all industries to feel represented and to feel like there is room for growth and leadership opportunities, regardless of where they work."

Leadership Kitsap welcomes participants at every career stage.

"Our programs are for anyone at any level of any business or organization," Meurs said. "That cross-perspective of different ages and job levels is really key to implementing the education we're offering."

Rather than focusing on titles, the organization looks for people willing to grow.

"We're looking for somebody who is open to learning, someone who will let us encourage them to engage and step outside their comfort zone," Meurs said. "It's ideal for them to desire growth in all areas, not just one."

### Building a Pipeline of Leaders

Leadership Kitsap was founded on the belief that communities need leaders before leadership vacancies arise.

"Leadership Kitsap was created out of this idea of a need for a continuing pipeline of prepared leaders," Meurs said. "If nobody is prepared before they step into that role, or before we need somebody to step into that role, we're starting from scratch."

Participants leave with stronger confidence, a deeper understanding of community systems and greater awareness of their own strengths.

"Confidence is one of the biggest benefits we hear," Meurs said. "They say, 'I get it now,' or 'I can do this.'"

"We focus a lot on personal strengths,"

Meurs said. "Helping people understand themselves better makes it easier for them to step into roles and take on projects. It's better for them—and it's better for their company, their church group, whatever they're working on, and ultimately for our community."

### Leadership Through Service

Community Impact Projects are central to Leadership Kitsap's curriculum. Working with nonprofit partners,



*Notes of gratitude, encouragement and congratulations cover a message board at Leadership Kitsap's office, reflecting the relationships and community connections fostered through the organization's programs. Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio*

each cohort identifies community needs, from food insecurity and homelessness to environmental stewardship and education, and develops lasting solutions.

"We really enjoy adding the community impact project component, because not only do we have tangible results for our community partners, but participants get a low-pressure way to put what they're learning into action," Meurs said.

Rather than assigning projects, participants work with community organizations to determine where help is needed most.

"It's not just, 'I think this is a cool idea,'" LeGrand said. "Partners have a voice in saying, 'These are the gaps we're missing—there's a huge scarcity of food in this area, there's a huge issue of homelessness.' Then together, they address them."

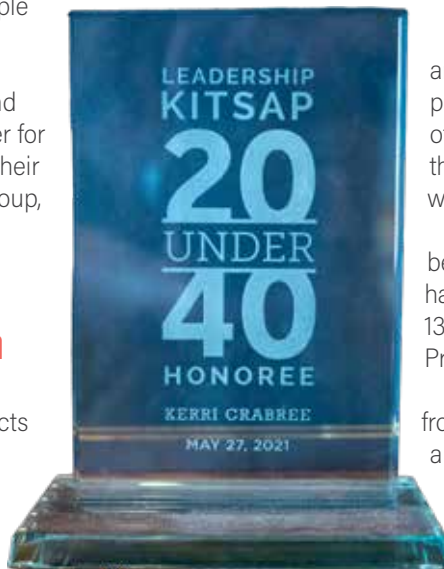
Longevity matters.

"We don't want one-and-done, performative projects," Meurs said. "Part of the process is: how will this last beyond your time with the team?"

Since the program began, Leadership Kitsap has completed more than 130 Community Impact Projects.

Meurs recalled one from her own 2017 class: a free dance program for underserved youth in downtown Bremerton.

"It was started in



## Feature

a little shack with the idea that once the Marvin Williams Center was built, the program would move there," she said. "Years later, someone told me how much that program meant to his community. These projects make differences in ways we may never fully know."

### Leadership Beyond Graduation

Graduation is often the beginning of a participant's leadership journey.

"Some people, during the program or shortly thereafter, are offered promotions or different jobs because of the development they've had over the year," Meurs said.

Alumni serve on nonprofit boards, hold executive leadership positions, volunteer throughout the county and serve in elected office.

One example is Dedra Miller, Leadership Kitsap's 2026 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient. After completing the program, Miller became a board member and trainer before being selected as executive director of Holly Ridge Center.

"She had demonstrated exactly what the organization needed in an executive director," Meurs said. "She was able to seamlessly step right in, and she's done such a good job in that space."

Meurs' own path followed a similar trajectory. After graduating in 2017, she joined Leadership Kitsap as a part-time program manager before becoming executive director.

### Benefits for Employers

Leadership Kitsap also serves as a talent development tool for employers.

"When an employee feels invested in, they invest back in you," LeGrand said. "That



*Graduates of the Leadership Kitsap Signature Program Class of 2026 celebrate the completion of the organization's 10-month leadership development program. Courtesy of Leadership Kitsap*

mutual agreement of 'you see something in me worth developing, and now I can bring that development back to improve our organization' is a powerful system."

Meurs encourages employers to identify emerging leaders early.

"They're growing and developing themselves for your benefit, and you get to use all the skills they're learning," she said. "People who employers see potential in should be sent through the program so those employers can be confident offering them that next promotion. Maybe they'll run the company one day."

The cross-sector relationships built during the program also create lasting partnerships.

"You're also opening up that organization to partnerships they probably wouldn't have had before," LeGrand said. "Now you have these relationships with people you've worked on very intense projects with over 10 months. We see companies working together because alumni know each other."

### Growing to Meet Community Needs

Since 2020, Leadership Kitsap has expanded beyond its flagship program to include the

*Leadership Kitsap was recognized as Nonprofit of the Year in 2023, honoring the organization's longstanding commitment to developing community leaders across Kitsap County. Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio*

20 Under 40 Awards, a women's leadership program and summit in partnership with the Greater Kitsap Chamber, and the Premier Institute, which offers one-day leadership workshops.

"We kept hearing, 'I wish it wasn't such a long program; I wish I could just tap in every once in a while,'" Meurs said. "That's a community need. So we created one-day workshops people can access as they're ready, including alumni who are asking, 'What's next for me?'"

The organization has also grown from one employee to three, allowing it to expand scholarships and improve accessibility. At its most recent graduation, a dessert dash raised more than \$14,000 for scholarships.

"Increased capacity means increased focus on program development, and because of that we have increased resources for accessibility," LeGrand said.

Leadership Kitsap's new five-year strategic plan focuses on increasing visibility, strengthening alumni engagement and ensuring programs continue to reflect community needs.

"We want the community to tell us what's important to them and to us," Meurs said. "We're encouraging people to expand their horizons, and we're looking to expand ours as well."

That includes strengthening long-standing partnerships with Kitsap's tribal communities.

"Our tribal partnerships are really important to us," Meurs said. "Without their support in what we do, we wouldn't be able



to offer quite the exceptional opportunities we have."

## Rooted in Purpose

Servant leadership has guided Leadership Kitsap since its founding.

"We've seen the benefits of investing in others before ourselves time and again," Meurs said. "Everything we do is for a greater purpose than self."

LeGrand summed up the organization's philosophy in

a phrase that has become its tagline.

"We say we're rooted in purpose and rising in service," LeGrand said. "We're empowering people to take that knowledge and then serve their communities."

And leadership, she said, isn't reserved for executives.

"We need leadership at every level that exists," LeGrand said. "It's a mindset, a mentality, and it's action." ■



*Leadership Kitsap's annual Dessert Dash raised a record amount this year to support scholarships for future program participants. Courtesy of Leadership Kitsap*



*Members of the Leadership Kitsap Signature Program Class of 2026 gather following their graduation ceremony. Courtesy of Leadership Kitsap*



*Carli Meurs (right) and Anjali LeGrand are helping shape the next generation of community leaders through Leadership Kitsap's growing portfolio of leadership development programs. Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio*



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# The Ecosystem Edge

INSIGHTS FOR BUILDERS, BACKERS, AND BELIEVERS

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

## The Future Of Defense Is Being Built In Kitsap

By **David Nierescher** | Program Manager, Northwest Tech Bridge

By connecting commercial innovators with naval defense, Kitsap is demonstrating how regional innovation can strengthen both national security and economic growth. The future of defense is changing faster than ever. Artificial intelligence, autonomy, robotics, advanced manufacturing, and other emerging technologies are redefining how wars are fought and won. We need only look to current conflicts—including Ukraine's use of autonomous systems—to see that military advantage increasingly belongs to those who can learn, adapt, innovate, and deploy the fastest.

At the same time, the source of innovation has changed. Many of the technologies transforming modern defense are emerging beyond the traditional defense industrial base—not from established defense contractors, but from early-stage startups, university laboratories, and “garage innovators” working at the speed of commercial innovation. Yet these companies often struggle to navigate the Navy's unfamiliar, slow, and complex acquisition process, while others decide the opportunity cost of engaging with the Department of Defense simply isn't worth it.

To maintain our competitive advantage, we need intentionally stronger pathways that connect the nation's most innovative companies with the Navy before our adversaries do.

### Technology Is Only As Strong As the Innovators Who Build It

America's technological advantage won't be determined solely by the systems we build. It will be determined by our ability to discover, support, and connect with the people creating what's next. And that innovation is already happening in Kitsap.

Few communities combine the concentration of naval expertise, maritime engineering, advanced manufacturing,



and entrepreneurial talent found in our region. Anchored by Naval Base Kitsap—one of the nation's largest centers for naval capability—Kitsap brings together engineers, manufacturers, researchers, technicians, entrepreneurs, and investors working to solve some of the world's most complex technical challenges.

Every year, experienced service members transition into the private sector, applying decades of operational knowledge to companies developing the next generation of commercial and defense technologies. Organizations like Matchstick Lab help those founders connect with mentors, partners, and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem, ensuring promising ideas have the support needed to become viable businesses.

Whether it's next-generation environmental protection, wireless marine mobility, or smarter waterway management, Kitsap's innovators are developing dual-use technologies that strengthen both our economy and our national security. While their applications may differ, they share a common purpose: solving complex problems through mission-driven innovation.

### Transforming the region's top innovators into the Navy's strongest defense

To close the gap between early-stage innovation and naval defense, I helped launch the Northwest Tech Bridge through NavalX in 2019. Since then, we've worked to connect innovators, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, investors, researchers, and Navy stakeholders into one of the nation's most trusted regional innovation ecosystem that transforms promising commercial technologies into mission-ready capabilities.

### And it's based right here in Kitsap.

Working alongside Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division (NUWC), Keyport, as well as local institutions like Kitsap Bank, Olympic College, Matchstick Lab at Vibe Coworks, the

Kitsap Economic Development Alliance (KEDA), and innovation partners across the Pacific Northwest, we've demonstrated how regional collaboration can accelerate innovation for both defense and commercial markets.

### Driving national security and regional economic growth

The impact of this work extends well beyond national defense. By nurturing this ecosystem, we aren't simply accelerating naval capability, but we're also strengthening Kitsap's regional economic growth. Every startup that succeeds, every manufacturer that expands, and every entrepreneur who chooses to build a company here contributes to a stronger Kitsap economy. The same ecosystem that accelerates capability for our men and women in uniform also creates high-skilled jobs, attracts private capital, strengthens local supply chains, and positions our region as a destination for innovation.

Over the past six years, through the Northwest Tech Bridge, we have demonstrated what that future can look like. Now we have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to build on that foundation.

### Innovation doesn't happen in isolation.

It grows where ambitious people and strong institutions come together to solve shared challenges. Kitsap's competitive advantage isn't just our naval presence or our technical expertise—it's our willingness to collaborate across industry, government, education, and entrepreneurship. The next chapter of this work belongs to all of us: business leaders willing to mentor founders, manufacturers eager to test new technologies, investors who see potential before everyone else, educators preparing tomorrow's workforce, and civic leaders committed to creating the conditions where innovation can thrive.

The next generation of defense capability will begin in communities like Kitsap—where innovation and mission come together to solve tomorrow's challenges. ■



# Kitsap County Confronts Public Safety Budget Challenges

June 22, 2026 | Kitsap County Commissioners Chambers, Port Orchard

Alysa Grimes, GKC Advocacy Committee Chair



The Greater Kitsap Chamber's Advocacy Committee works on behalf of local businesses to monitor, respond to, and shape the policies that affect how they operate, from local budget decisions to state and county regulations. The committee serves as a bridge between our member businesses and our representatives, carrying members' concerns to decision makers and, just as often, bringing information back from those representatives to our members. The following recap of Kitsap County's recent public safety budget meetings is an example of that second role: keeping members informed on the local policy issues the committee tracks closely on their behalf.

Kitsap County concluded its three-part community budget listening tour with a discussion focused on law enforcement and the criminal justice system, outlining the financial challenges driving a projected 2027 budget shortfall of between \$9 million and \$9.8 million. County officials emphasized the meetings were informational and intended to gather public feedback before budget decisions are made.

The meeting carried additional significance following Sheriff John Gese's announcement that he and four members of his command staff will retire on June 26. County leaders have acknowledged that budget concerns contributed to the timing of those departures.

## Budget Pressures Continue to Grow

County budget staff reported that while the 2026 General Fund budget is balanced, rising costs are expected to outpace revenues next year.

Several factors are contributing to the challenge:

- 76% of the General Fund supports public safety and judicial services.
- Property tax revenue growth is limited to 1% annually, regardless of property value increases.
- Labor costs account for more than 70% of county spending, while insurance and medical expenses continue to rise.
- Staffing levels have not kept pace with county population growth.
- County reserves, currently just under \$40 million, could be depleted by 2031 without corrective action.

To address the projected shortfall, officials outlined two primary options: adopting a 0.1% sales tax dedicated to criminal justice services, estimated to cost residents \$20–\$40 annually, or reducing county staffing levels. Previous presentations suggested

cuts could total as many as 60 positions countywide, including approximately 25 positions within the Sheriff's Office.

## Public Safety Impacts

Sheriff Gese described the budget challenges as part of a broader statewide trend driven by inflation, workforce shortages, and increasing operational costs.

He noted that jail medical expenses continue to rise as inmates often arrive with medical, mental health, and substance-use needs. Overtime costs have also increased due to staffing shortages, while technology requirements such as body cameras add ongoing expenses.

According to Gese, Kitsap County currently operates with approximately 0.64 deputies per capita, compared with the state average of 1.5 deputies per capita, despite continued population growth.

## Prosecutor's Office Feeling the Strain

Prosecutor Chad Enright told attendees that personnel costs dominate the office's budget, leaving few opportunities for meaningful savings through reductions in supplies or services.

He said criminal prosecution has experienced significant staffing reductions over the past two decades, with the office eliminating positions and narrowing specialized services while managing increasing demands from state mandates and court requirements. To maintain operations, the office has increasingly relied on grants, contracts with local cities, and prioritization of violent felony cases.

## Looking Ahead

A consistent message emerged throughout the county's budget discussions: rising costs for public safety, health care, and

**Continued page 24**



Continued from page 23



personnel are growing faster than available revenues.

Whether county leaders ultimately pursue new revenue, staffing reductions, or a combination of both, the decisions made later this year will shape the future of law enforcement, prosecution, and court services throughout Kitsap County. ■

## Meet the Newest Member of the GKC Team

In June, the Greater Kitsap Chamber welcomed Kaylee Worley as its new Membership Growth & Engagement Manager. Bringing extensive experience in membership management and a strong understanding of the Kitsap business community, Kaylee will play a key role in strengthening member engagement and support. The Chamber is excited to have her on board and to continue building meaningful connections and delivering value to businesses throughout the region.



Kaylee Worley

to actively get back out into the business community. It is going to be wonderful to get face-to-face with some of the new businesses here in Kitsap, and reconnecting with some folks I've had

the pleasure of working with in the past. Kitsap has been experiencing a strong period of growth and I am very excited to be able to contribute to that by advocating for our members!

### Q: What is one thing you love about Kitsap or the Kitsap business community?

I was born and raised here, and as a 4th generation Kitsap County resident I think it still has that "small town" vibe even though there has been so much growth and expansion. Kitsap is so unique ecologically, and economically - we get to benefit from the beautiful area we live in and the proud traditions of PSNS and NBK Bangor. Our businesses and small business owners here have played a huge role in building a sense of community and culture around Kitsap's history that I think is unique.

### Q: What made you interested in working at the Chamber?

I was excited about the opportunity to work with the Chamber after having been a member myself for several years before I made the shift into working in the non-profit sector. It felt like a great next step in my career!

### Q: What is something you're excited about as the Membership Growth & Engagement Manager?

I am really looking forward

# June Membership Luncheon – 2026 Annual Meeting

At the Greater Kitsap Chamber's June Membership Luncheon, we celebrated the Chamber's fourth



Alexandra McLaughlin



Duncan Sinclair



Charlie Thompson

anniversary since the Silverdale and Bremerton Chambers merged in 2022. This year, under the leadership of Past Board Chair Susan Larsen and CEO/President Irene Moyer, the Greater Kitsap Chamber has served the business community through key partnerships, renewed advocacy efforts, and participation in the community. GKC's mission is to build a stronger Kitsap, and as the Chamber enters its fifth year, the staff and Board of Directors look forward to making it a remarkable year of growth, connection, and collaboration.

At this luncheon, the Chamber recognized its newly appointed board members and two board members renewing their terms of service: Brett Clark (BC Fitness Studio), Ashley



Ashley Oaksmith



Brett Clark



April Onofre



Heidi Hartman

Oaksmith (Kitsap Regional Library), Alexandra McLaughlin (St. Michael Medical Center), April Onofre (Kitsap Bank), Charlie Thompson (North Kitsap Fishline), Duncan Sinclair (The UPS Store), and Heidi Hartman (Details Property Management). ■







# Leadership Kitsap Celebration

GKC Board member, Ashley Oaksmith, received a Distinguished Board Service award at Leadership Kitsap's Celebration of Leadership program in June, from incoming Leadership Kitsap Board President and Chamber President & CEO, Irene Moyer.

## Pop Up Visitor Booth at the Bremerton Fan Zone



The Chamber was in the Americana spirit at the July 1st Fan Zone in Quincy Square. GKC had the opportunity to prepare 500 free hot dogs for fans who visited the square to watch the USA vs Bosnia Herzegovina game. Thank you to all the volunteers who came out and made this event possible.



GKC Membership Manager, Kaylee Worley, Downtown Bremerton Association Executive Director, Jessica Combs, and GKC President & CEO, Irene Moyer, enjoy a pause in the activities at the Bremerton Fan Zone.

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## New and Renewal Memberships for June

**We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!**

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Land Title Company of Kitsap County (1968)

### Growth

Kitsap Golf & Country Club (1977)

### Main Street

Maynard's Restaurant Inc. (2019)  
West Sound Workforce (1999)

### Business

United States Submarine Veterans Inc. Bremerton Base (2024)  
A-1 Roofing Inc. (2014)

**All Ways Caring HomeCare (2026)**

Arnold's Home Furnishings (1975)

BC Fitness Studio (2022)  
BNI Pacific Northwest (2013)  
Bremerton Historic Ships Association (1997)  
Bremerton Housing Authority (2021)  
Great Peninsula Conservancy (2019)  
Kitsap Pride Network (2021)  
Leadership Kitsap Foundation (2014)  
North Kitsap Fishline (2024)  
Pacific Northwest Title (2010)  
**Profits First with Purpose, LLC (2026)**  
Rebuilding Hope the Sexual Assault Center (2024)  
**Royale Notary LLC (2026)**  
Tupperware (2022)  
WILD Applause (2021)

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.

# GKC Around the Community

## June Chamber: Off the Clock

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, the Greater Kitsap Chamber's after-hours networking was held at Kitsap Credit Union's Silverdale branch. KCU provided the perfect venue for a relaxed and inviting networking space,

helping to foster meaningful connections among our business community. Thank you to Kitsap Credit Union for hosting and Old Town Kitchen for providing the beautiful spread. ■



## Silverdale Community Center Celebration



Rep. Tarra Simmons and County Commissioner Katie Walters along with members of the Silverdale Community Center Foundation Board of Directors and Chamber President & CEO Irene Moyer, celebrate the purchase of the future home for the community center on Bucklin Hill.



# The Biggest Marketing Mistake Isn't Bad Advertising. It's Being Forgotten.

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

**B**usiness owners often ask me what the biggest marketing mistake they can make is. They expect me to talk about ineffective social media posts, poorly designed ads, or spending money in the wrong places.

While those things matter, I believe the biggest marketing mistake is much simpler.

It's being forgotten.

Think about the last time you needed a plumber after a pipe burst, a contractor for a remodel, or an accountant during tax season. Chances are you didn't start by researching every available option. You probably began with the businesses you already recognized. Maybe you had seen their name in a local publication, noticed their sponsorship at a community event, driven past their sign for years, or remembered a recommendation from a friend.

That familiarity matters more than many business owners realize.

Customers are busy. Between work, family, emails, and endless responsibilities, they don't have the time or desire to evaluate every business from scratch. When it's time to make a purchase, they naturally gravitate toward companies they know,

recognize, and trust.

Recognition reduces uncertainty.

That is why marketing is about much more than generating leads. It is about staying present long enough to become familiar.

Unfortunately, many businesses approach marketing only when they need immediate results. They advertise for a few weeks during a slow period, business improves, and the marketing stops. A few months later, the phone slows down again, and they start the cycle all over.

It's the marketing roller coaster.

The problem is that every time you disappear, you begin to lose the familiarity you've worked so hard to build. Marketing momentum isn't something you can turn on and off like a light switch. It compounds over time through consistent exposure.

This is why the businesses that seem to be "everywhere" often have an advantage. They may not spend dramatically more than their competitors, but

they show up consistently. You see them in local publications. You notice them supporting community events. You recognize their digital ads. You hear about them through local organizations and word of mouth.

Every one of those touchpoints reinforces the same message: **We're here.**

**We're established.**  
**You can trust us.**

No single advertisement creates that feeling. Consistency does.

That doesn't mean you have to be everywhere or have an unlimited marketing budget. In fact, one of the smartest strategies for a small business is to choose a handful of channels that reach your audience and commit to them over time. A combination of trusted local media, targeted

digital advertising, community involvement, and social media often creates a much stronger presence than putting every dollar into one tactic.

The goal isn't to chase every new marketing trend. The goal is to stay visible long enough that people remember you when they need you.

Because here's the reality: your biggest competitor isn't always the business across town. It's the dozens of other companies competing for your customer's attention every single day. If they don't remember your name, they can't choose you.

The businesses that continue to grow year after year understand this. They don't think of marketing as something they "try" when sales are slow. They treat it as an ongoing investment in their reputation, their visibility, and their future.

So instead of asking yourself, "How can I get more leads this month?" try asking a different question.

**"What am I doing today to make sure customers remember me tomorrow?"**

Because the businesses that win aren't always the ones with the biggest advertising budgets.

More often than not, they're simply the ones that are hardest to forget. ■

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



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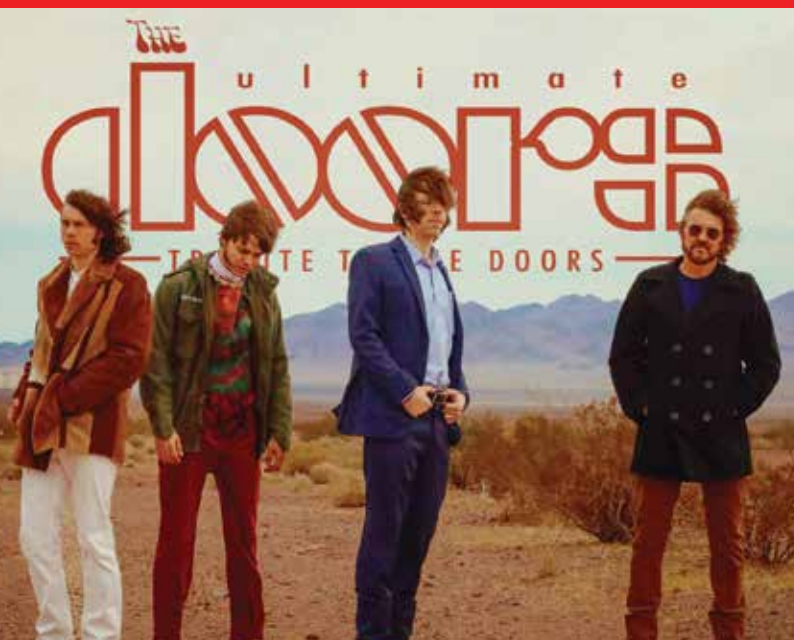
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# Recruitment

## Your Best Recruiter Isn't Your Recruiter. It's Your Reputation.

**By Monica Blackwood**

President & CEO West Sound Workforce

**D**oes this sound familiar? You've crafted an intriguing job post and blasted it out for the world to see, created a competitive job offer, including great benefits, have a solid team, and genuinely enjoy the culture you've built. You expect qualified candidates to come knocking. Instead, applications trickle in. Or worse, they never arrive.

The job itself may not be the problem.

Long before someone clicks "Apply," they've already begun forming an opinion about your organization. Today's candidates don't just evaluate job descriptions, they evaluate employers. In fact, research shows that about 75% of job seekers research a company's reputation before submitting an application. They read employee reviews, browse your website, look at your social media presence, and often ask people in their network what they've heard about working there.

That's your *employer brand*.

Many business leaders think employer branding belongs to the marketing department. While your consumer brand shapes how customers see your business, your employer brand shapes how current and future employees experience it. The two certainly influence one another, but they aren't the

same. A company can have a strong customer reputation while struggling to attract talent or become an employer of choice without being a household name.

Your employer brand is built every day through the experiences people have with your organization. It's the way candidates are treated during the hiring process. It's what employees tell their friends over coffee. It's how managers lead their teams. It's the consistency between what you promise and what employees actually experience once they join.

In other words, your employer brand exists whether you're intentionally building it or not.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that employer branding is about looking perfect. It isn't. Candidates aren't searching for perfection. They're looking for authenticity. They want to know the "day in the life": what it's really like to work for your organization and whether they'll thrive there. That's where culture plays an important role.

Organizations often talk about having "a company culture," but businesses with multiple locations know each office develops its own personality. While the company's values may be consistent, local leadership, team dynamics, and community all shape the employee experience. Those differences aren't weaknesses,

see them as strengths instead.

Great recruiting means hiring for both the organization and the team. A candidate may align with your company's values, but their long-term success often depends on how well they fit the specific office and people they'll work with every day.

The good news? Building a strong employer brand doesn't require a large marketing budget or a complete organizational overhaul. It starts with intentionality.

A few simple steps can make a meaningful difference:

- Ask your employees why they stay. Their answers often reveal your greatest strengths, some of which you



may know and others that may surprise you.

- Evaluate the candidate experience. Every email, phone call, interview, and follow-up contributes to your reputation, regardless of whether someone is hired. Ask for their feedback.
- Tell real stories. Showcase the people behind your business. Authentic employee experiences resonate far more than polished marketing messages.
- Empower local leaders. Encourage each office to build culture in ways that reflect both the company's

values and the unique personality of their team.

- Make your promises match reality. The strongest employer brands aren't created through clever messaging. Consistently delivering the experience you describe is the foundation.

Here's another way to think about it: every employee is part of your recruiting team, even if recruiting isn't in their job description. Every interaction they have with customers, colleagues, vendors, friends, and prospective employees, adds another brushstroke to the picture others form about your organization.

The organizations attracting exceptional talent today aren't necessarily the ones with the biggest recruiting budgets.

They're the ones whose reputation consistently reflects who they are.

When your employer brand authentically tells that story, recruiting becomes less about convincing people to join your company and more about attracting people who already believe in what you stand for, leading you to become an employer of choice.

The next time a great candidate accepts your offer, give credit to the recruiter, and to the rest of the team. Chances are your organization started recruiting them long before anyone ever picked up the phone. ■

*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.*

# Q & A

Executive

*Capt. Baerg visits Cougar Valley Elementary School, during Month of the Military Child.*

*Photos Courtesy of U.S. Navy*

## Meet Capt. Alexander Baerg

Commanding Officer, Naval Base Kitsap

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

**A**s Commanding Officer of Naval Base Kitsap, Capt. Alexander Baerg oversees one of the nation's largest and most strategically significant naval installations. Home to more than 80 Navy commands and supporting more than 40,000 military personnel, civilian employees and contractors, Naval Base Kitsap plays a vital role not only in national defense but also in the economic vitality of Kitsap County. A Washington native who returned home after a 26-year career in the submarine force, Baerg shares his vision for the future of the installation, the importance of partnerships with local businesses and communities, workforce development, major modernization efforts, and the leadership philosophy guiding one of the region's most influential organizations.

### Please tell our readers a little bit about yourself.

I am a proud Washington native, having grown up in Everett. My desire to serve led me to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. Though I originally had a strong interest in aviation, I ultimately selected the submarine community due to its shorter initial service commitment. Ironically, that "short commitment" turned into a fulfilling 26-year journey—and counting!

Throughout my career, I've had the distinct privilege of serving on every type of submarine in the fleet. That path has required my family and me to live all over the United States, moving more than a dozen times. However, taking command of Naval Base Kitsap (NBK) in February of this year has been a true homecoming. This region



*Capt. Baerg shows he's a Sailor's sailor, mopping the floor at the NBK galley.*



is where I met my wife, where we were married, and where two of our three children were born. After traversing the country for decades, returning here to serve both our fleet and the local community that means so much to my family is an absolute honor.

### **Please tell our readers about Naval Base Kitsap.**

Naval Base Kitsap (NBK) was established in 2004 when Naval Station Bremerton and Naval Submarine Base Bangor were combined into a single installation. While the installation headquarters sits in Bremerton, NBK actually spans more than 11,000 geographically dispersed acres and more than 170 miles of waterfront across Kitsap, Mason and Jefferson Counties.

NBK is home to over 80 separate Navy commands, including:

- Navy Region Northwest, which provides oversight and support to Navy bases and activities across 11 states, from Alaska to Oregon and eastward to Minnesota and Iowa
- Eight ballistic missile submarines assigned under the command of Submarine Group Nine, a cornerstone of our nation's strategic deterrent.
- Two aircraft carriers: USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76), and in the near future we are anticipating USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72) coming to call NBK home
- Numerous fast-attack submarines, including the nation's only large-volume research and development submarine
- Puget Sound Naval Shipyard & Intermediate Maintenance Facility (PSNS & IMF), our region's premier maintenance and modernization facility, and one of only four public ship yards in the United States
- Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC) Division Keyport, which sustains current undersea warfare technology and explores new capabilities for the future

We're proud to support over 40,000 military personnel, civilian employees, and contractors that serve at the commands onboard NBK. This includes approximately 15,000 Sailors and Marines, one of the largest concentrations of U.S. Navy personnel on the West Coast.

NBK has a significant impact on the Kitsap region—economically, socially, and environmentally. How would you describe the base's current relationship with

surrounding communities, and where do you see room for improvement?

Our relationship with Kitsap County's communities is fundamentally strong, built on mutual respect and shared prosperity. The success of this installation is inseparable from the health and prosperity of our surrounding communities. Our civilian employees, active-duty service members, and their families are deeply integrated into local schools, volunteer organizations, and civic activities. Both the base itself and other local commands maintain active partnerships with local governments, school districts, and community organizations.

While our foundation is solid, any successful relationship requires continuous commitment and effort. I see a few key areas where we can continue to strengthen this vital relationship:

- Infrastructure coordination: Working closely with county and municipal

planners on transportation and utility improvements to proactively address the impacts of regional growth.

- Workforce development: Expanding partnerships with local educational institutions to create seamless pathways between military service and civilian careers in the region.
- Environmental collaboration: Enhancing joint efforts on Puget Sound restoration and other regional conservation initiatives.
- Communication: Maintaining open, regular dialogue about base operations and their potential impacts on the surrounding community.

### **What role does the base play in workforce development and opportunities for civilians in the area?**

Our federal civilian workforce is the backbone of everything we do and



*Capt. Baerg (center), along with Adm. Daryl Caudle (right), chief of naval operations, and members of NBK Fleet and Family Readiness, cut the ribbon to open the Warrior Eatery on NBK-Bangor.*



*Command photo of Capt. Alexander Baerg.*



*Capt. Baerg (center), along with Sailors across Naval Base Kitsap, cut a cake on Oct. 14, 2025, in honor of the Navy's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

## Executive Q & A

developing that talent is a national security imperative. Civilians serve in a vast array of vital roles across NBK and our 80+ tenant commands, from highly skilled industrial trades and engineering to complex program management and administrative support.

We don't just hire for jobs; we build lifelong careers in public service. First, our largest commands operate with predominantly civilian teams, and they customize their own advanced training programs to match the precise, cutting-edge skills their employees need to excel. Second, we provide comprehensive skills and leadership training throughout the year to ensure our civilian team members grow alongside their military counterparts. Finally, we are actively out in the community at regional job fairs and hiring events to show local residents the incredible benefits, stability, and purpose that come with a career in federal service.

Ultimately, we want local talent to know that their work here keeps our fleet ready and our nation safe, while also building generational stability and prosperity for their families.

### **What do you hope local businesses and community members understand about the Navy's role here in Kitsap County and the broader region?**

As we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary, we want our neighbors to know that Kitsap County sits at the very heart of Naval Base Kitsap's maritime story.

First, Navy Region Northwest has an immediate global impact. The work done across NBK, Naval Air Station Whidbey



*Capt. Baerg and his wife, Nichole, at the Bremerton Armed Forces Day Parade.*



*Capt. Baerg signs a proclamation for Domestic Violence Awareness Month during a spin-a-thon event at Naval Base Kitsap.*

Island, and Naval Station Everett ensures that our Navy remains the world's most combat-credible fighting force, capable of maintaining peace through strength.

Second, our operational success is completely reliant on the health of our civilian neighbors. The Navy is deeply woven into the fabric of Kitsap County. Our personnel don't just work here—we live here, our kids go to school here, and we volunteer in your neighborhoods.

Finally, the challenges that come with regional growth are shared between the Navy and the greater community, which means we have an immense opportunity to grow responsibly and sustainably together. By revitalizing our defense industrial base with long-term programs like shipyard optimization, we are building a resilient, highly skilled region that lifts up both the Navy's mission readiness and the community's economic vitality.

### **What do you believe are the biggest opportunities ahead for Naval Base Kitsap over the next several years?**

Our biggest opportunities lie in modernization and preparation for the future fleet. First and foremost is supporting the generational upgrades to our infrastructure, particularly with the multi-mission dry dock at PSNS & IMF. Modernizing our critical maintenance facilities ensures we can sustain the Navy's fleet for decades to come.

Additionally, we are preparing our footprint to integrate new platforms. Alongside

welcoming the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the near future, we are actively laying the groundwork for the eventual arrival of Ford-class carriers at NBK-Bremerton. We are also preparing for the homeporting of Virginia-class and Columbia-class submarines at NBK-Bangor. Ensuring our shore infrastructure is ready for these next-generation assets is vital to maintaining our role in national defense and the strategic deterrence mission.

Finally, our operational growth presents an incredible opportunity to deepen our integration with Kitsap County. As we modernize the installation, we have a unique chance to work hand-in-hand with local businesses, educational institutions, municipal partners, and civic leaders to tackle shared challenges such as transportation, infrastructure, and housing. By treating these as shared local opportunities, we can help build a resilient, highly-skilled regional workforce that benefits both the Navy's mission readiness and the economic prosperity of surrounding communities.

Leadership is central to your role. What leadership principles guide your approach, and what qualities do you believe make an effective leader?

My approach to leadership is rooted in a simple principle: I strongly believe in the good in people. The overwhelming majority of people want to come to work and do the absolute best they can, and a leader's job is to facilitate that goal.



With an installation as vast and diverse as Naval Base Kitsap, no single person can oversee every detail. That is why I rely heavily on empowering the teams around me. An effective leader must be an active listener who trusts their personnel to execute. My role is to provide the strategic vision, remove obstacles, and then trust the expert leaders I've empowered to step up and meet our critical mission demands every single day.

**Are there any standout partnerships or collaborations with Kitsap County institutions—such as schools, nonprofits, or businesses—that you're particularly proud of?**

I'm incredibly proud of the partnerships my team has built with local jurisdictions on critical planning initiatives. One example is the Joint Land Use Study, a document collaboratively developed with local governments to ensure compatible land use around the installation, addressing key areas like transportation access, shared infrastructure, and shoreline activities.

Another standout effort is the Joint Compatibility Transportation Plan (JCTP). Recently completed by the City of Bremerton and funded by the Department of War, this plan was designed to strategically inform future growth decisions within the context of Navy mission readiness.

Furthermore, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) Northwest has been strengthening its relationship with the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance (KEDA) as we get closer to breaking ground on the multi-mission dry dock. By educating

businesses on military contracting processes and identifying local resources that meet the Navy's needs, we are directly connecting our mission to local economic growth. These collaborative efforts underscore our dedication to being a good neighbor.

**What are your top priorities during your tenure as Commanding Officer of NBK?**

My primary objective is to align the staff at Naval Base Kitsap to ensure maximum delivery of fleet focused outcomes. Given the massive footprint and diverse nature of this installation, our organization must be agile and precisely aligned.

Building a highly efficient staff structure is essential for delivering our two non-negotiable core missions: ensuring the absolute safety and security of the base and providing the highest possible quality of life services for our personnel and their families. Whether it is enhancing housing, dining, and recreational support, or refining our security posture, my priority is creating a streamlined command structure that reliably supports everyone who lives and works here.

**What motivates you every day in this role?**

After more than two decades of solving highly technical, submarine-centric problems at sea, the sheer scale and diversity of the challenges here on the shore are incredibly motivating. Running an installation like NBK isn't just about base operations—it's about managing a massive, interconnected ecosystem of security, logistics, infrastructure, and community

relations. What gets me out of bed every morning is the knowledge that the decisions we make today have an immediate, tangible impact. We aren't just keeping the fleet combat-ready; we are directly improving the daily lives of our Sailors and Marines, supporting our thousands of civilian employees, and strengthening the vital bond between the Navy and our Kitsap neighbors.

**What are your long-term goals for NBK, and what legacy would you like to leave behind?**

Commanding an installation of this magnitude is a relay race, not a sprint. Many of the complex challenges we are tackling—and the massive modernization projects we are beginning today—will take years or even decades to fully realize. My long-term goal is to run my leg of this race as effectively as possible, ensuring NBK is firmly postured in its infrastructure, security, and personnel to support the Navy's next-generation platforms, from Columbia-class submarines to Ford-class carriers.

Because my time in command is just one chapter in this installation's long history, my focus is on how I hand off the baton to the next leader. I want to leave behind an installation that is functionally stronger, more agile, and more deeply connected to the Kitsap community than when I arrived. I hope to be remembered as a commander who removed barriers for my team, fiercely advocated for our Sailors, Marines and their families, and proved that the Navy and Kitsap County are strongest when we navigate the long game together. ■



*Capt. Baerg (right), along with former NBK Commanding Officer Capt. John Hale, pose for a photo with culinary directors during the Armed Forces Day Culinary Competition.*

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# Personal Development

## More

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

**"More!"** It was March 17, 2011. I was standing in my parents' two-bedroom assisted living apartment. The hospice people had just left after speaking with Dad. In the room with me were Mom, Barb, my sister Rita, and my daughter Mindy, who happened to be home from university for spring break.

Dad knew what hospice meant. Shortly after they left, he slipped into unconsciousness. We called them back, and they confirmed the dying process was underway and it wouldn't be long.

I had come to understand that people in a comatose state can still hear and comprehend. Each of us took a turn talking to Dad and I could see on his face that he heard us. After everyone said something, I came up with an idea to allow others to do the same.

I called my Aunt Gloria, brother Les, sister Kathy, and daughter Kelli. They were all living in various places around the country at the time.

I put the phone on speaker mode and up to Dad's ear. Each person spoke their goodbyes and, again, I felt that Dad heard every word—even though he couldn't verbally respond.

After we finished, a huge pall fell over the air. As luck would have it a young staffer named Sarah came in with chocolate chip mint ice cream and asked if we would like some. I told her that was exactly what we needed.

As I was enjoying my ice cream, a scoop fell on the floor right below my foot without me knowing it.

Suddenly, all the women in the room literally screamed at me in unison, "STOP!"

It was as if I was a helicopter in a no-fly zone over the White House! "What???" I exclaimed.

I was informed of the ice cream under my foot and the dire implications if I stepped on it.

Really?

We all broke out in much-needed laughter.

Barb was seated next to Dad holding his hand, keeping him part of the group. She said to him, "Your son. He almost stepped on ice cream!"

Dad sat bolt upright in his recliner, stared straight at Barb and exclaimed, "Did someone say ice cream?"

We were stunned. I said, "Yeah, Dad. We're all eating ice cream. Do you want some?"

He turned to me with a wild-eyed look and exclaimed, "Certainly!"

We all watched as Dad devoured the ice cream Barb fed him. Sarah stuck around to watch, as she was fond of Dad. As Barb shoveled his favorite food into his mouth, she asked him a question that would normally be reserved for a 3-year-old. "Dad, wasn't that nice of Sarah to bring you ice cream? What do you say to her?"

Dad turned to Sarah with the same mad look in his eyes, gulped the ice cream and blurted out with earnestness ...

"MORE!"

His last words could not be more fitting. More.

Dad wanted more ice cream, and we wanted more time with him.

Shouldn't we be asking for MORE right now? Finding ways to create MORE right now? Being MORE fearless, MORE forgiving, MORE present?

I surmise that at the end of our lives, we will still desire MORE—no matter what we've accomplished. However, it's a reminder that we are here now and, with good fortune, we still have a whole lot MORE time now.

So, let's do something with it.

As I write this column, I'm preparing to go on my annual buddies' golf trip with my high school friends of now over 40 years. This annual trip we call Jumanji started in 1996 when we are all about 31 years old. This will be the 31st edition. Crazy.

When we started, the thought of "more" wasn't really considered. It was all about golf. Today, while we still love the golf, it's

really the vehicle that brings us together. It's our time to celebrate over four decades of friendship.

While that period of celebration will end with everyone dispersing back home, our "normal" life relationship celebrations can be continuous if only we allow them to be.

To experience "MORE," we need to invest in being present. That means more than being physically there. It's become a discipline that I must practice and be intentional of daily.

We all get busy, and our brains are so complex that we can have a gazillion thoughts processing all at the same time. When I recognize that in myself, I stop what I'm doing and focus on my breathing to slow my heart and brain rate. I then whisper to myself, "One thing at a time."

That might mean re-focusing on the grandchildren when we're together. It might simply mean being present with my wife Barb as we are watching a movie and eating popcorn together at home.

Being present is a skill. It demands practice and discipline. It also requires patience because we all will fail at times. Yet if you master this, you will get MORE.

When we can focus on keeping our head in the game, simplifying life, putting ourselves in good positions for success, and staying present, we ultimately will achieve so much MORE in life than we imagined. ■





# Ink, Intention & Community

Photos by Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio



**S**tinging Nettle Studio is a special place built on love, intention, and care. Now approaching its fourth year in business, what began as owner Ana Dueñas' solo tattoo practice has blossomed into a welcoming studio filled with talented artists and a strong sense of community.

Longtime artist Holly Jane Ink joined the studio during its first year, and more recently, internationally traveling tattoo artist Krystel Ivannie became part of the team. Together, they bring exceptional artistry, genuine kindness, and a deeply personal approach to every client experience.

Stinging Nettle Studio is proudly queer-owned and committed to creating an affirming, neurodivergent-accommodating environment

where everyone feels welcome. Nestled in beautiful Kingston, the cozy, plant-filled studio intentionally maintains a quiet atmosphere, with no more than two artists working at a time. The intimate setting allows each artist to truly listen to clients, provide personalized care, and create meaningful works of art that keep people coming back.

While the team is currently focused on continuing to grow and refine the studio rather than hosting events, their dedication to fostering an inclusive, supportive space remains at the heart of everything they do.

**Follow the artists on social media:**

@fernewt • @hollyjaneink  
@krystel\_ivannie ■

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# Real Estate

## Education, Workforce & the Future of Work in Kitsap County Real Estate

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

**K**itsap County's real estate market is being shaped by more than interest rates, inventory, and home prices. Behind every transaction is a larger story about education, workforce development, commuting patterns, remote work, and the changing expectations of buyers, sellers, employers, and investors. As the region continues to grow, the connection between where people live, where they work, and how they prepare for the jobs of the future has become one of the most important conversations in real estate.

Kitsap County has long benefited from its unique position within the Puget Sound region. It offers proximity to Seattle and Tacoma while maintaining the character of smaller waterfront communities such as Bremerton, Silverdale, Poulsbo, Port Orchard, and Bainbridge Island. That balance continues to attract military families, remote workers, retirees, first-time buyers, and professionals seeking more space and quality of life. According to recent U.S. Census Bureau data, Kitsap County's estimated population reached 283,374 in 2025, with a 70.1% owner-occupied housing rate and a median owner-occupied home value of \$555,100 for 2020–2024.

This growth is also reflected in housing demand. Recent market data from NWMLS showed Kitsap County homes selling for a median price of approximately \$606,000 over the three months ending May 2026, with homes averaging just eight days on the market. These numbers tell an important story: Kitsap remains desirable, competitive, and closely tied to the broader regional economy.

But real estate success in the next decade will depend on more than available homes. It

will depend on whether Kitsap County can support the workforce needed to build, sell, finance, maintain, and service those homes.

Education is central to that future. Olympic College plays a key role in preparing local residents for careers in growing industries throughout Kitsap and Mason counties. Its professional-technical programs include pathways designed for working adults, career changers, and students seeking certificates or two-year degrees that lead directly into employment. For real estate, construction, property management, lending, insurance, and development, this type of local workforce training is essential.

The real estate industry itself is also becoming more education driven. Today's real estate professionals must understand far more than pricing and contracts. They are expected to advise clients on market trends, zoning, environmental considerations, financing options, relocation patterns, multigenerational housing, investment strategy, and digital marketing. Buyers and sellers are more informed than ever, and they expect professionals who can interpret data, explain risk, and guide decisions with confidence.

Workforce development also affects affordability. A healthy housing market depends on teachers, nurses, contractors, shipyard workers, hospitality employees, public servants, and small business owners being able to live near where they work. When housing costs rise faster than wages, employers face recruitment and retention challenges. That makes housing not only a real estate issue, but also an economic development issue.

The Olympic Workforce Development Council works across Kitsap, Clallam, and Jefferson counties to support workforce systems in partnership with businesses, training providers, and industry leaders. Its focus on job seekers, employers, and training partnerships reflects the kind of regional coordination needed as Kitsap prepares for continued population and employment growth.

The future of work is also changing how people choose homes. Remote and hybrid work have made home offices, high-speed



internet, flexible floorplans, and quiet workspaces major buyer priorities. Census data shows that 95.3% of Kitsap County households had a broadband internet subscription during 2020–2024, making connectivity a significant lifestyle and economic asset. Homes are no longer simply places to rest after work; they are offices, classrooms, studios, gyms, and gathering places.

This shift has created new opportunities for developers and builders. New communities that include dedicated workspaces, energy efficiency, walkability, and access to recreation are increasingly attractive to modern buyers. Mixed-use developments that combine housing, retail, services, and flexible office space may also become more important as people seek convenience closer to home.

Kitsap County's long-range planning reflects the need to prepare for this future. The county's 2024 Comprehensive Plan serves as a 20-year blueprint for local policy, planning, capital facilities, population growth, and employment growth through 2044. That planning will influence where housing is built, how infrastructure is expanded, and how communities accommodate both residents and businesses.

For employers, the future of work in Kitsap County will require creativity. Companies that offer flexibility, training, career pathways, and proximity to housing will be better positioned to attract talent. For real estate professionals, understanding workforce trends will be just as important as understanding comparable sales.

For buyers, the question is no longer only, "Can I afford this home?" It is also, "Does this home support the way I live and work?" For sellers, highlighting features such as office space, internet access, efficient layouts, and proximity to employment centers can help a property stand out.

Kitsap County's real estate future will be built at the intersection of education, workforce development, and lifestyle. As the region evolves, the strongest communities will be those that connect people not only to homes, but to opportunity. In that sense, real estate is more than property—it is the foundation for how Kitsap County learns, works, grows, and thrives. ■





# What a Destination Marketing Organization does and how it benefits your business

**Y**ou've seen them on the ferry: the couple with kayaks strapped to the roof rack, the family studying a trail map, the friends debating where to grab lunch in Poulsbo. They didn't end up on the Kitsap Peninsula by accident.

Someone invited them.

That's the short version of what a destination marketing organization, a DMO, does. The longer version is worth knowing, because whether or not you work in tourism, visitors are part of your bottom line.

**First, what a DMO isn't.** Visit Kitsap Peninsula isn't a chamber of commerce, and it isn't a government agency. Chambers serve their member businesses. A DMO serves the destination itself: promoting the entire peninsula to people who live somewhere else, so they'll come here, stay a night or two, and spend money while they do.

**Guess what: you're not paying for it.** DMO work is funded primarily by lodging tax, a small tax visitors pay on hotel rooms and short-term rentals, invested through Kitsap County and its cities: Bainbridge Island, Bremerton, Port Orchard, and Poulsbo. In other words, the travelers who came last year are funding the invitation to the travelers who come next year. That foundation is strengthened by partners who believe in the destination, including the Suquamish Tribal Council, the Port of Bremerton, and other local organizations. Tourism promotion is one of the few economic development tools that pays its own way.

**"But I don't own a hotel."** Fair. Here's why it still matters: visitor dollars don't stay at the front desk. They flow to coffee shops, gas stations, kayak outfitters, breweries, hardware stores, and farm stands. In

2025, tourism generated \$528M in direct visitor spending in Kitsap County, money that arrives from outside our community and circulates inside it. Those dollars also generate tax revenue that helps fund local services without raising a dime from residents.

## What about the "management" part?

More visitors can mean more traffic and busier ferry lines, and a good DMO thinks about that too. This is why so much of our work focuses on the shoulder seasons: filling hotel rooms and restaurant tables in March and October, when businesses need the boost, rather than adding to the August crowds. Destination management also means spreading visitors across the whole peninsula and promoting the kind of tourism that fits who we are: trails, water, small towns, local makers rather than chasing volume for its own sake.

## How does the work actually happen?

Targeted campaigns reach travelers in our strongest drive markets like Portland, Spokane, Bellingham, and Vancouver, Washington, people looking for an easy Northwest getaway who may not realize what's waiting on this side of the water. We host travel writers so the peninsula shows up in regional magazines and travel guides. And unlike a billboard, this work is measurable: modern DMOs track where visitors come from, where they go, and how long they stay, so marketing dollars follow what actually works.

## Why market the peninsula together instead of town by town?

Because visitors don't think in city limits. They think in trips. A traveler who comes for a gallery walk might discover Port Gamble, stay in Silverdale, and eat dinner in Bremerton. When the peninsula is promoted as one

destination, every community's slice of the pie gets bigger.

If you run a business that visitors might enjoy or one that serves the businesses they visit, get connected. Make sure your information is current on visitor-facing channels, share your events, and think of Visit Kitsap Peninsula as a megaphone that's already pointed at your future customers.

The bicycles, hiking boots, wagging dogs, and kayaks on the ferry aren't a coincidence. They're the result of deliberate, measurable, visitor-funded work, and there's room for your business in the story we're telling. ■







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## What is Involved in Hand Therapy?

The Doctors Clinic Occupational Therapy, Salmon Medical Center

By Jenn Downes Pearson | Marketing Coordinator The Doctors Clinic

### The Healing Touch: How Hand Therapy Restores More Than Just Movement

When our hands are functioning perfectly, we rarely give them a second thought. They button our shirts, grip our morning coffee mugs, and connect us to the world through touch. But when an injury, arthritis, or a condition like carpal tunnel syndrome strikes, the sudden loss of autonomy can feel overwhelming. While rest and medication offer temporary relief, true recovery often requires a specialized approach that looks at the bigger picture. Enter the world of Certified Hand Therapy—a highly specialized discipline dedicated to reclaiming the intricate mechanics of your hands and arms.



### The Holistic Connection: From Shoulder to Fingertip

A common misconception is that hand therapy begins and ends at the wrist. In reality, the discipline recognizes that the entire upper extremity operates as a unified chain.

This comprehensive perspective blends the muscle-strengthening principles of physical therapy (PT) with the practical, daily-living adaptations of occupational therapy (OT). The result is a bespoke rehabilitation journey designed not just to mend a bone or tendon, but to seamlessly reintegrate complex movements back into your lifestyle.

### The Gold Standard of Care

Earning the CHT credential is no small feat. These professionals are elite practitioners who have transitioned from standard licensing in PT or OT into an intensive specialization. Before even qualifying to sit for their rigorous certification exam, a therapist must accumulate at least three years of clinical experience, including 4,000 hours of direct, hands-on practice in upper extremity rehabilitation. This level of mastery ensures that whether a patient is dealing with the progressive tissue changes of Dupuytren's contracture, nerve compression from carpal tunnel syndrome, or sudden trauma from a joint injury, they are receiving care grounded in deep anatomical expertise.

### What to Expect on the Journey

A typical course of treatment at dedicated facilities like The Doctors Clinic Occupational Therapy at Salmon Medical Center spans roughly six weeks, though the timeline is entirely dictated by individual progress and medical needs.

The therapeutic process is highly collaborative and multi-layered:

- Precision Evaluation: The journey begins with an exhaustive assessment of your current range of motion, strength, dexterity, pain levels, and wound healing.
- Tailored Exercise Programs: Therapy progresses from gentle, controlled movements—like passive shoulder

circles—to resistance training designed to rebuild muscle integrity.

- Functional Adaptation: Therapists actively help you modify challenging everyday behaviors, practicing the mechanics of holding a toothbrush or carrying groceries until confidence is restored.
- Beyond the Exercises: CHTs provide vital clinical interventions, including swelling management, custom splint creation, and the crucial emotional scaffolding needed to navigate a frustrating recovery period.

### The Path Forward

Medical consensus emphasizes that when it comes to upper extremity recovery, timing is everything. Initiating early, controlled movement under expert guidance prevents long-term joint stiffness and complications, laying the groundwork for optimal long-term results.

For those experiencing persistent discomfort or recovering from surgery, securing a referral from a primary care physician to a CHT is a vital first step. With insurance and Medicare frequently covering these medically necessary services, the path back to pain-free, fully functional living is well within reach. Don't let chronic pain dictate your capabilities; your hands are your primary tools for experiencing life, and they deserve specialized care. ■

*Disclaimer: This content, regardless of date, should not be used as a substitute for direct medical advice from your doctor or other qualified clinician.*





## Building Kitsap's Outdoor Economy, One Adventure at a Time

How John Kuntz spent four decades building Olympic Outdoor Center and helping shape Kitsap County's outdoor recreation economy.

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

**F**or nearly 40 years, Olympic Outdoor Center has helped thousands of people experience Kitsap County from the water and the trail.

What began as a garage-based kayak business has grown into one of the region's best-known outdoor recreation companies, offering kayak and bike rentals, guided tours, classes and signature experiences from Poulsbo and Port Gamble. Along the way, founder John Kuntz has helped shape Kitsap's tourism industry, championed the creation of the Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail and built a business he believes showcases the county's greatest asset: its natural landscape.

None of it was part of a master plan.

When Kuntz moved to Washington from

Illinois in 1982, his introduction to the Pacific Northwest came on the Wenatchee River.

"The first thing I did was go on a river rafting trip on the Wenatchee River," he said. "I just had a great time, loved it... big whitewater. I liked the people, liked the guides and everything."

Those guides taught him to raft, but another craft caught his attention.

"I saw these people in these really small plastic kayaks that looked super fun," Kuntz said. "I thought, that's way more fun than a big raft."

*John and first employee Julie Jorgenson at the start of OOC. Photo Courtesy of Olympic Outdoor Center*





After learning to kayak and becoming a certified instructor, Kuntz began teaching lessons from his garage. By 1986, he had founded Olympic Kayak Company, the business that would eventually become Olympic Outdoor Center.

He soon realized rafting alone wasn't a sustainable business. As interest in kayaking grew, he shifted toward instruction, rentals and guided trips. In 1992, he moved into a former auto repair shop in downtown Poulsbo, where the business began offering rentals directly from Liberty Bay. A partnership with the Port of Poulsbo the following year provided dock space and storage, giving Olympic Outdoor Center a permanent waterfront home.

Over the years, the business expanded to include youth programs, adult classes, guided tours, bike rentals and special events while Kuntz became one of Kitsap's leading tourism advocates, serving as president of Visit Kitsap for about 15 years.

## Building a National Water Trail

After paddling around the Kitsap Peninsula in 1992, Kuntz imagined connecting its shoreline into a single water trail.

"I thought this would be a great water trail," he said. "We could link all this together."

Working through the North Kitsap Trails Association, volunteers partnered with three counties, 13 port districts, three tribes and multiple cities to map the route. With support from the National Park Service, the Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail became part of Kitsap County's master plan before earning designation in 2014 as one of the nation's first 20 National Water Trails—and the first saltwater trail in the system.

"Things just kind of progressed," Kuntz said. "We became a national water trail."

For him, the project was about protecting access as much as recreation.

"It's one of the richest marine environments in the world right here," he said. "We didn't have a water trail, and development was ongoing. I realized

**Community leaders celebrate the designation of the Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail, the nation's first National Water Trail on salt water. Photo Courtesy of Olympic Outdoor Center**

we're going to lose all this if we don't do something."

## Helping Revive Port Gamble

As the 2008 recession approached, Kuntz saw another opportunity.

"In 2008 during the recession, I could see that it was going to be tough times," he said.

He relocated much of Olympic Outdoor Center's operations to Port Gamble, then a quiet former mill town beginning its transition into a tourism destination.

"At the time, Port Gamble was nothing," he said. "You'd walk down the street and there'd be nobody there. Jon (Rose) could see that we were an anchor business, and it could bring in more business for the town."

The move paid off. Today the company offers kayak rentals, tours, classes and one of the region's largest rental bike fleets serving visitors exploring the Port Gamble Forest Heritage Park. The cycling business has grown enough to occupy its own renovated building.

"We just ran out of space in the store," Kuntz said. "They were going to make this available to us, so we decided to rent it and renovate it. It looks pretty cool."

## Creating Experiences

Outdoor recreation has changed dramatically over four decades, and Kuntz has adapted with it.

One of Olympic Outdoor Center's fastest-growing offerings is its guided bioluminescence tour in Port Gamble Bay.

"Port Gamble Bay is one of the hot spots in the whole country for bioluminescence," Kuntz said. "Because of its connection to Hood Canal, we get the influx of nutrients. The organism just comes into the bay with the flow of the water."



**Olympic Outdoor Center's guided bioluminescence kayak tours have become one of its most popular seasonal experiences. Photo Courtesy of Aaron Kuntz**



**Olympic Outdoor Center's original Front Street location in downtown Poulsbo helped establish the business as a waterfront recreation destination. Photo Courtesy of Olympic Outdoor Center**

**Guided group paddles introduce visitors and locals alike to Kitsap's scenic waterways. Photo Courtesy of Aaron Kuntz**





## Feature



*A kayaker explores the calm waters of Kitsap County on a sunny day.*  
**Photo Courtesy of Aaron Kuntz**

The late-night kayak tours have grown from two nights a week to six during peak season.

"You're out there pitch dark," he said. "We started out just doing two days a week, then three, and now we're six days a week."

He's also preparing to launch illuminated kayak tours in Poulsbo using remote-controlled color-changing lights.

### Investing in People

Kuntz measures success not only by customers but also by employees.

"I've hired over 400 kids in 40 years," he said. "It's really cool when they come by and say hi and bring their families or their significant others and let me know how they're doing."

Many of those employees started with little or no work experience.

"Then we show them how to work," he said. "We train them on how to do the job properly and how to dress, look, talk in front of customers. It's a great experience for a young person to build that confidence in themselves."

His management philosophy is what he calls "super vision."

"It's to look ahead," he said. "Always be aware of what's going on—your finances, your employees' time, whatever it is. If you can anticipate problems and solve them, you just created a much easier life for yourself."

That outlook traces back to advice from the pool manager who first taught him to kayak. During one slow season, Kuntz considered quitting until his mentor challenged him.

"He said, 'Man, don't come in here and cry to me. Get out there and earn that business,'" Kuntz said. "I was like, you are right."

Kuntz doubled down on marketing and community outreach.

"You've got to earn it," he said. "No one's gonna just give it to you. Along the way, you find those little nuggets that create success, and then you concentrate on those and make those work for you. That's how you build the business."

### Looking Ahead

Kuntz believes outdoor recreation remains one of Kitsap County's strongest economic assets.

"It just speaks to what Kitsap is," he said. "We have a lot of natural open space, a lot of forested areas. That's the attraction for

grow your  
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people—the parks, the biking, the kayaking, the fishing, the nature walks. I think that's what brings people here."

Businesses like Olympic Outdoor Center help transform those natural assets into longer visitor stays and greater spending at local restaurants and shops.

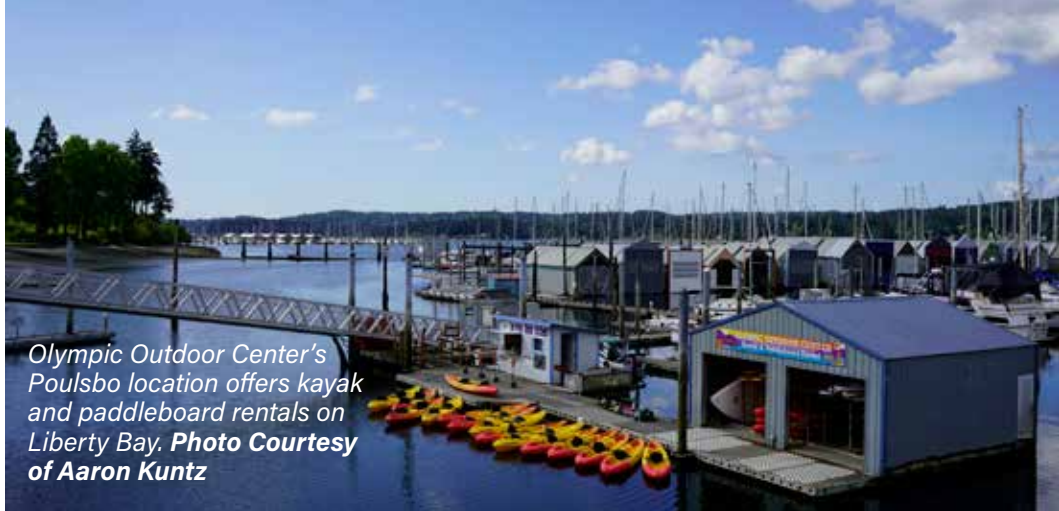
"We're a very vital part in growing Poulsbo over the years we've been here," he said. "And we're doing that in Port Gamble too."

Even after four decades, Kuntz still sees opportunities for entrepreneurs willing to start small.

"There's always an opportunity," he said. "But you have to be willing to build it. People give up too easily. If I gave up the first time I ran into trouble, I'd be out."

His confidence in the future comes from the same place his business has always been rooted.

"This type of business we do here is going to last forever," he said. "There's always going to be Puget Sound. There's always going to be people that want to go out and see it, and interact with it. And we built our business around that core principle—giving that experience to people in the highest possible way we can." ■



*Olympic Outdoor Center's Poulsbo location offers kayak and paddleboard rentals on Liberty Bay. Photo Courtesy of Aaron Kuntz*



*Olympic Outdoor Center's Port Gamble location serves as a hub for kayak rentals, guided tours and cycling adventures. Photo Courtesy of Aaron Kuntz*

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## Building a business is one thing.

### Selling a business is something else altogether.

By **Matthew Augspurger** | Wealth Advisor, Founder Strong Retirement Solutions®

(Part 1 of 2, This edition address selling your business, next edition we discuss buying a business.)

**W**hen a business owner gets closer to retirement, there is an element of uncertainty and expectation that starts to swell. You know how much work it took to build your business, and you want someone to understand and appreciate all the stress, the late nights, the tears, and the exhilaration that have gone into making your business what it is today. You want to make sure your good name and your people are protected, and you want to be fairly compensated for all your work.

There are three things to remember in selling your business: Know the Value, Maximize the Value, and Find the Culture Fit.

#### Know the Value.

Jason Early, Chief Revenue Officer of Biz Equity says "98% of owners don't know the value of their business." Where do your customers come from? How much does it cost to get a new customer? Do you have a system in place to attract and engage new

customers? How well does that system work without you (and your star personality) running it? What part of your business is most profitable and what part is most costly?

#### Kitsap Company

Owners of a tools and equipment business were on the verge of retirement and they took a hard look at their company to figure out where the best profits were coming from. They found that one product line

in particular had great margins, dependable suppliers, and repeat customers. They separated this one part out, sold the rest of the business and have run this one product line from their home as a retirement project. They got the money from the sale, and five years later(!) they are still getting a steady stream of income from the part they enjoy doing. They found the value

in their business and earned a double benefit.

#### Maximize the Value.

After you know your value, you need to maximize it. What is the actual EBOC (Earnings Before Owners Compensation). Any business owner worth their salt is maximizing write offs and using IRS approved loopholes to legally increase their compensation and decrease their taxes.



What things are you legally deducting or writing off that the new owner could keep as revenue? Greater revenue combined with financial transparency is very attractive to the buyer.

Many times the best way to maximize the business is to improve debt management. Reduction of liabilities equals better cash flow. And track your trends, what are your strengths and your faults? No business is perfect. Buyers don't expect the business to be perfect, they are often looking for ways to buy it and improve it right away. But no one likes bad surprises and Kitsap is too small for bad deals. Do the right thing and a lot of people know about it. Do the wrong thing and everybody knows about it. Work for the win/win business deal.

#### Find the Culture Fit.

Author Ivan Misner, the father of modern networking, says "Culture eats strategy for breakfast every time." Culture fit with the buyer and seller is key; values compatibility means you speak the same language. You both need to know where does the company go from here and what are the intentions of the seller and buyer for the next five years?

#### Kitsap Business

A local waterfront business owner introduces the new buyer to the staff several times so the staff feels comfortable with the transition. The new owner gives the staff a few more vacation days per year which helps with morale and staff buy in. The buyer and seller have the same work ethic, and both know the industry very well, and we help structure the deal in two parts to help the buyer with cash flow and the seller with tax deductions. Cash up front plus a trailing payout to the seller for three years of consulting services. This allows for a major opportunity to reduce taxes because the trailing payout is not going to the seller, it's going to his newly formed consulting business, which gives him the opportunity for write-offs and deductions. Plus the seller staying on as consultant benefits the buyer because it gives the buyer help and advice in running the new, bigger business.

This is the tip of the succession iceberg, but start with Know the Value, Maximize the Value, and Find the Culture Fit. ■

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