

KITSAP

September 2026

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Carmen Garringer and her mother, Jaci Bryant, share a moment inside Verse & Vine, their romance bookstore and wine bar in downtown Poulsbo.

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Photo Courtesy of Olya Blase

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Where Romance, Wine and Community Meet in Downtown Poulsbo

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TBR on Tour

A Bookstore That Brings the Stories to You

TBR on Tour brings a Victorian-inspired bookstore directly to readers across the Kitsap Peninsula. Owner Suzie Vasquez transformed a trailer into a mobile shop featuring books by women authors, creating a distinctive business that visits markets, wineries and community events while fostering connections among readers wherever it parks.

Bloedel Reserve

Where Beauty Becomes a Way of Connecting

Bloedel Reserve is more than a Bainbridge Island destination. The 140-acre public garden combines conservation, horticulture and community connection while supporting tourism and nature-based well-being. Behind its tranquil experience is a nonprofit operation focused on sustainability, philanthropy and preserving a distinctly Pacific Northwest landscape for generations to come.

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Stop waiting for the perfect economy

Forward 
THINKING

There is always a reason to wait.
Wait for interest rates to come down. Wait for inflation to settle. Wait until hiring gets easier. Wait until consumers feel more confident. Wait until the election is over, the housing market improves or we have a little more certainty about what comes next.

Business owners have become pretty good at waiting for normal.

I'm beginning to wonder whether normal is coming back.

Maybe the more important question is whether we need it to.

Over the past several years, businesses have navigated a pandemic, supply chain disruptions, inflation, labor shortages, rising interest rates, rapidly changing technology and shifts in how and where people work. Artificial intelligence is now changing jobs and business models at a pace we're only beginning to understand.

And just when one challenge begins to settle down, another seems to take its place.

At some point, uncertainty stops being a temporary condition and simply becomes part of doing business.

That may sound pessimistic. I don't think it is.

I think it's an opportunity to reconsider what makes a business strong.

For a long time, strategic planning was largely about predicting what would happen next. Where will the economy be in three years? What will customers want? How quickly will the market grow? What will it cost to borrow money?

Those are still important questions.

But perhaps the better question for business owners today is this: How quickly can we adjust when we're wrong?

That's a different way of thinking about the future.

It means maintaining enough financial flexibility to absorb a difficult quarter. It means paying attention to customers instead of assuming they'll behave

tomorrow the way they did yesterday. It means developing employees who can learn new skills as technology changes their jobs.

And increasingly, it means being willing to change something that is still working before circumstances force you to.

There are examples throughout this issue of Kitsap Business.

Olympic College is expanding programs and working with employers as workforce needs change. President Chantae Recasner talks about preparing students not simply to use new technology, but to think critically, adapt and bring the human skills technology cannot replace.

Safe Boats International is investing in welding and fabrication training as the maritime industry faces workforce shortages. Olympic College is launching a computer science associate degree to create another pathway into technology careers here in Kitsap County.

These aren't predictions about exactly what the economy will look like five years from now.

They're investments in the ability to respond to whatever it looks like.

I think small businesses should be thinking the same way.

We sometimes assume resilience means surviving difficult circumstances. That's certainly part of it. But resilience in business isn't just hanging on until conditions improve.

It's building a company that can change.

That might mean adding a new service because customers are asking for something different. It might mean using technology to eliminate work that no longer needs to be done manually. It could mean training someone already on your team rather than waiting months to find the perfect employee.

It could also mean deciding that an old way of doing business has run its course.

None of those decisions require knowing exactly what happens next.

They require paying attention.



One of the advantages small businesses have is that we can move. We don't need six committees and a yearlong strategic review to change direction. We can listen to a customer on Tuesday and try something different on Wednesday.

That's easy to forget when uncertainty makes us cautious.

Caution has its place. There are times to preserve cash, postpone an expansion or decide that an opportunity isn't worth the risk.

But there is a difference between being cautious and standing still.

The businesses that emerge strongest from this period probably won't be the ones that correctly predicted interest rates, inflation, artificial intelligence or consumer spending.

They'll be the ones that built organizations capable of responding when those things changed.

As we head toward the final months of 2026 and begin thinking about 2027, that's worth considering.

Don't build your business plan around the assumption that everything will finally settle down.

Build a business that doesn't need it to. Stop waiting for the perfect economy. It probably isn't coming. And maybe that's OK. ■

Terry Ward
Publisher, Kitsap Business

OUR TEAM



Terry Ward
CEO & Publisher
terry@ward.media



Amy M. Yaley
COO & Co-Owner
amy@ward.media



Quinn Propst
Reporter
quinn@ward.media



Harmony Liebert
Multi-media Sales Manager
harmony@ward.media

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ward media, LLC **Kitsap Business Magazine**

19225 8th Ave NE
Suite 201 PMB 232
Poulsbo, WA 98370
(360) 328-1052
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Feature

Between the Keys

How Bremerton Typewriter Company Keeps a Century-Old Craft Alive

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

In an era when most words are written on glowing screens, the steady clack of a typewriter still echoes from a modest storefront in downtown Bremerton.

Inside Bremerton Typewriter Company, century-old machines line the shelves waiting for a second life. Some are treasured family heirlooms. Others belong to collectors, writers or businesses that still rely on them every day. One by one, they make their way to the repair benches, where owner Paul Lundy and his team patiently clean, rebuild and restore machines that many assumed disappeared long ago.

It's an unlikely business in the digital age. Yet more than a decade after Lundy purchased the shop, demand has never been stronger.

An Unexpected Career Change

Lundy never planned to become a typewriter repairman.

"I worked in facilities for over 30 years taking care of buildings," he said. "Then I saw a news article in the Seattle Times titled 'Last Typewriter Repairman.' I read the article and thought, Wow, that's really interesting. I told my wife, 'I think I want to go down and meet this guy.'"

The "last repairman" was Bob Montgomery, a master technician who

had spent decades repairing typewriters. Montgomery, who died in 2018 at age 96, began learning the trade as a child in his father's downtown Seattle shop, changing ribbons and repairing machines for more than 85 years.

Lundy's visit wasn't about buying a business.

"The guy was amazing," Lundy said. "Fascinating individual, and just willing to share everything."

The two began meeting for lunch, where

Lundy listened to Montgomery's stories. During those visits, he noticed typewriters steadily piling up around the shop.

"I asked him about it and he said, 'Oh yeah, that news article. I've got so much business. It's too much,'" Lundy said. "So I just asked if I could help. One day a week turned into two, then three. And then it was like, Wow, I'm actually having a lot of fun."

What began as curiosity gradually became an apprenticeship. Eventually, Lundy asked whether Montgomery would consider selling



Bremerton Typewriter Company owner Paul Lundy carries on the trade he learned from longtime repairman Bob Montgomery.

Photos, newspaper clippings and thank-you notes line the walls, preserving memories of Bob Montgomery and the history of Bremerton Typewriter Company



the business.

"He said, 'Well, yeah, okay. But you realize this is probably a fad. In 10 years, you need to be prepared to be looking for another job,'" Lundy said. "He was really practical. He'd been through some hard times."

Lundy purchased the business in 2014.

The shop traces its roots much further back. Founded in 1947 as Bremerton Office Machine Company, it once serviced everything from calculators to adding machines before narrowing its focus exclusively to typewriters. Today, operating as Bremerton Typewriter Company, it is believed to be the only full-time typewriter repair business remaining in the Puget Sound region.

A Growing Demand for Old Technology

From the outside, typewriter repair might seem like a trade destined to disappear. Inside the shop, the reality is quite different.

"We actually have what's become a standard eight-week backlog of work," Lundy said. "Even this summer, when we thought it was going to slow down, it just never did."

When Lundy first entered the business, repairs followed a seasonal cycle.

"It evolved from being quite cyclical and with immense downtime," he said. "It was busy in the wintertime, and then in summer there would be no business. People were out and about, going to the bicycle shop for repairs in the summer. Then in the winter, when they're more introspective and looking at that pile of typewriters they bought on the internet, they'd think, Oh my God, I wonder if there's a typewriter shop."

Those slow summers have disappeared.

Today, Lisa Knox works full time alongside her husband at the repair bench. Griffin Stoss, a part-time technician, also repairs machines, and the company maintains a rotating apprentice position to help train the next generation.

Even with the expanded staff, the waiting list remains about two months long.

Lundy believes the renewed interest goes

beyond nostalgia.

"It's the one machine where you can sit in front of it and it puts print right in front of you," he said. "There's nothing but you and your mushy little brain putting thoughts on the page."

One customer, a professional author, writes every first draft on a typewriter.

"She's told me it saves her editing time," he said. "It's slower for her to put it in print first and then do all the technology stuff so she can edit it. But she says she doesn't move paragraphs around as much as she used to. She puts more words on the page that work than she ever used to."

For many customers, the simplicity is part of the appeal.

"People have found that the first product they put on the page in front of a typewriter is more real and accurate," he said.

More Than Collectors

The shop's customers come from every walk of life.

"The family heirlooms are quite a bit of our business," Lundy said. "The grandkids will be at the grandparents' house and see this old typewriter sitting on the shelf. They ask to pull it down and start trying to use it, and

A portrait of longtime typewriter repairman Bob Montgomery hangs inside Bremerton Typewriter Company. Montgomery mentored Paul Lundy before Lundy purchased the business in 2014.

the kids are totally enamored. Meanwhile the grandparents are going, 'Oh my God, I did my thesis on that so many years ago.'"

Many of those machines receive complete restorations before returning to the families that have owned them for generations.

"They want them useful again," he said. "They want them back in the family. It's fun to see."

The business is also sustained by collectors.

"The typewriter enthusiasts really have kept us in business," Lundy said. "Without the volume of work they bring in today, we would not be here. We wouldn't be able to pay rent, pay for the phone, certainly not our salaries."

Businesses still make up another portion of the customer base.

"The founder of the company used this typewriter and they want to keep it useful in the shop, or there's the legacy employee who still works there and still wants to use



Owner Paul Lundy works on a typewriter at Bremerton Typewriter Company, where repairs make up the majority of the business.



Typewriters awaiting repair fill the shop as Bremerton Typewriter Company works through an eight-week backlog.

From there, repairs become more technical. Rubber platens, paper rollers and feet often need replacement, particularly on machines built before World War II. Some replacement parts no longer exist.

"I'm rebuilding a motor and gear assembly on a 1934 Woodstock," he said. "This machine has been with us for a couple of months. It's been very slow because there are no parts. I was making a part for it in the machine shop today."

When necessary, the shop fabricates components in-house or works with a network of specialty suppliers and fellow enthusiasts around the country.

"Once we get it cleaned and adjusted and replace broken parts, we start putting everything back together," Lundy said. "We put ribbon in, test all the functions. When you think you're done, we do what we call a final test. We let the machine sit overnight, and then one of the other technicians does a final test to make sure everything's working."

If something isn't quite right, the machine returns to the original technician for additional work.

Some restorations take months.

"It feels good when it's done, fixed," he said.

Looking at the Past Differently

The oldest typewriter Lundy remembers restoring dates to 1897.

"My perspective of what's old has changed," he said. "You'll have things from the year 1900 that only need to be cleaned and they work fine."

Working alongside Montgomery also changed how he views aging.

"My whole perception of old, productive people has changed," he said. "When I met Mr. Montgomery, he was 92. He worked every day and took the bus down from his apartment. People don't pay a lot of attention to the elderly. You're kind of a has-been by the time you get old, and people don't realize that when they were in their 50s, these people were rocking."

That perspective extends to the business

itself.

Although customers often admire the vintage machines displayed in the showroom, Lundy says the shop survives because of the work taking place behind the scenes.

"When you walk into the shop, the front of the shop is really selling typewriters," he said. "Many of the machines there are collector machines we sell for a lot of money. But what you don't see is the less expensive machines because they sell immediately and leave the shop."

Sales help keep the lights on, but repairs keep the business alive.

"I'd say 90 percent of our income is derived from repairs," he said. "At \$55 an hour, time and again I can look at my monthlies and see that while we sell typewriters – and thank God, it pays rent – mostly our income is from repairs. Repairs win every time."

For nearly 80 years, the business has adapted as office technology evolved – from calculators and adding machines to a singular focus on typewriters. Today, while most communication happens with keyboards and touchscreens, Bremerton Typewriter Company continues to prove there is still room for craftsmanship, patience and machines built to last.

One repaired typewriter at a time, the shop is preserving not only a disappearing trade, but the satisfying rhythm of words striking paper. ■



their typewriter every week."

Industrial customers sometimes find that a mechanical machine simply works better.

"I've seen shipping warehouses where their manifest software doesn't align well with the printing," Lundy said. "They get tired of it and decide, 'Let's just stick a typewriter out in the warehouse and get those manifests done.'"

Then there are the writers.

"The smallest group are the actual authors, the actual writers," he said. "They're a small group but dedicated, focused. They understand which machines work best for them."

Artists have also embraced the machines.

"There are people who do beautiful typewriter art," Lundy said. "And there are artists who will physically take apart typewriters to create art as well."

He points to local artist and retired teacher Kelye Kneeland, who creates portraits with typewriters, and a Poulsbo artist who incorporates typewriter parts into fused-glass artwork.

"I actually think of typewriters as industrial art," Lundy said. "With the really old machines, like sewing machines, they did those beautiful decals. They made them pretty. I'll get in a machine from 1915 and just sit back and look at it and go, Wow, they really put some thought into what it should look like."

Bringing Machines Back to Life

Behind the showroom is the heart of the business.

"I tell people that 90 percent of what we do is clean things," Lundy said. "I rarely get a typewriter that is actually clean. Almost always what's wrong is that it's gotten sluggish with old oils and dust and grime. If you can get those out of the mechanisms, they usually just need minor adjustments."

The shop even has a room devoted entirely to cleaning.

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Forget building it, just buy a business!

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

(Part 2 of 2. This issue addresses buying a business; previously discussed was selling a business.)

It is the eager dream of many entrepreneurs to buy a business. The right people make an introduction, the price is perfect, the fit is fantastic, the profits are profound. You pick it up without missing a beat, add value, and double the revenue. That's the dream.

The reality is that buying a business is complicated. Most often it's made complicated because the seller wants you to realize (really, really realize) how much work it took them to build it. From scratch, against adversity, through COVID, ...uphill both ways, ...while carrying firewood. And because they built it, they are almost always going to believe that it's worth more than it actually is.

There are three questions to answer in buying a business: Is the business making money? How will an acquisition affect the company? What is the seller looking for?

Is the business making money? When you buy a business, you jump onto a moving locomotive. You have revenue and expenses, products and vendors, and employees (with personalities, and skills, and history). This can be amazing because you avoid trial and error and skip right to momentum. But no business is perfect, so a \$100,000 business has \$100,000 problems. And a million-dollar business has million-dollar problems. That comes with the territory... as long as there is profit to weather those storms. If you can see on the P&L (profit and loss statement) that there is profit, and by you coming on board you can add more value (bringing your skills,

or funding, or expertise), that's a big green flag. However, if the business isn't making money, it's harder to turn it around. Once successful companies are now treading water or looking to sell quickly (often because of debt, outdated products/services, or poor market demand). TEDx speaker and leadership expert Angela Vassallo says, "It's easier to give birth than to raise the dead." So choose wisely.

How will the acquisition affect the company? Some businesses make money just because of the owner; they have a unique skill or they have star power. If a new owner comes in, how will the business change?

Look for the missing sock - A couple wanted to buy a laundromat and on paper the deal looked enticing. The business had great cash flow, a steady stream of repeat customers, and required minimal staff. But upon looking closer, like a dryer load with a sock missing, there was an empty line on the P&L. Where were the fix-it costs for the wear and tear on the washers and dryers? It turns out that the owner was a gifted mechanic. The cost of hiring someone to do the repairs was over \$35,000 a year, which dirtied the profits and ended up killing the deal.

Often the idea of a new owner creates stress on the current staff. They ask questions like "Who's getting fired? What's going to change? Why should I stay?" These are essential questions to answer. Garret Gunderson said, "In the absence of communication, negativity fills the void."



Once a deal is being worked out, let the current team know that you are here to keep a great business going. Listen to the things they find most important and the things they want to see changed. Don't overpromise (realistically you will probably change things and have staff turnover), but let them see you write it all down and make sure they feel heard.

What is the seller looking for?

Sellers are unconsciously looking for reasons not to sell their business. Remember they've never sold a business before, so they don't know what to expect. As a buyer, you need

to walk into a meeting with as much certainty as possible. Bring well-thought-out and easy-to-explain answers – timing of the deal, buyout structure, maintaining staff, keeping the company name.

Mike Bilotta of Gladstone Associates (an M&A firm) said, "The most successful buyouts involve the buyer telling the story of their own firm and including the seller in the next chapter." Constantly remind the seller of the reasons to combine and collaborate so they get on board with your vision of the future of the company.

Buying can be the beginning of a beautiful relationship, so start with: Is the business making money? How will an acquisition affect the company? What is the seller is looking for? ■

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Jaci Bryant and Carmen Garringer opened Verse & Vine to create a space designed for readers to linger, connect and enjoy a glass of wine.



Verse & Vine

Where Romance, Wine and Community Meet in Downtown Poulsbo

By Quinn Propst |
Ward Media Staff Reporter

What began as a mother looking for a way to connect with her adult daughters has become one of downtown Poulsbo's newest gathering places.

A couple of years ago, Jaci Bryant picked up a romance novel for the first time in years. It wasn't because she had rediscovered the genre. She simply wanted something to share with her daughters.

"Between my husband and I, we have four daughters, 19 to 25 now, three of them avid romance readers," Bryant said. "So I got back

into romance reading two years ago, and I did it specifically to have connection and conversation with them, and it worked. We would have great dinner conversations on which book and which book boyfriend and all of the things. It was a great time, and then this kind of developed into the store."

Those conversations eventually inspired Verse & Vine, an independent romance bookstore and wine bar that Bryant opened with her daughter and business partner, Carmen Garringer. The business debuted July 3 in a renovated 1906 building just off Front Street, creating a destination that blends books, wine and conversation into what the owners hope becomes a community gathering place.

"We really wanted to create a space for people to just be," Bryant said.

"There are people that come in on a regular basis, even not even being open for a month, and they can come in on their own and not feel uncomfortable, or what the pressures of sitting at a restaurant might

look like if you're by yourself."

"Here, people walk in and they just immediately have a huge smile every time," Garringer said. "It's very fulfilling. It's good energy."

The idea crystallized during a December trip to a romance bookstore for an author signing.

"Being in that space, there was just such a sense of community with everyone that was there," Garringer said. "While we were there, we're like, we could probably do this, and also, why isn't there any wine here?"

That simple question became the foundation of their business model. Within seven months, Bryant and Garringer had transformed an empty storefront into a business unlike anything else in Kitsap County.

Creating a Place to Stay

From the beginning, every detail was intentional.

"Even the smell in here was important to

us, and the sounds that are going on, and the visual of what's happening," Bryant said. "I think there's a fully immersive experience going on."

Inside, deep green walls, brass accents, antique furnishings and jewel-toned seating create a cozy atmosphere that encourages visitors to settle in with a book or a glass of wine. A velvet sofa anchors one corner beneath the front windows while comfortable seating is scattered throughout the shop.

The signature green walls have become such a talking point that Garringer created bookmarks listing the paint color after customers repeatedly asked about it.

Much of the furniture came from Facebook Marketplace, where each piece carried its own history.

"Everything came with its own story, and I wish I had written most of them down," Bryant said. "We would tell them we were putting it in a bookstore, and they were just so excited about where their heirloom was headed off to."

One of the centerpiece furnishings is an ornate library table rescued from Portland. Behind the wine bar, a stained-glass window will eventually become a pass-through into an expansion currently under construction.

"We mixed the new with the old," Bryant said.

The aesthetic's appeal has also surprised them.

"We were very surprised at the demographic of romance readers typically being women, how many men are coming in," Bryant said. "They're using it as date night. They love the green. I don't know if that becomes like a biological thing with them, but they are very, very excited about the green."

Outside, a shaded patio has become one of the shop's most popular features.

"The patio space has been a huge success," Bryant said. "We're cozy in here, and the plan always was to have the addition we're building out back."

That addition, known as the Conservatory, is expected to open this fall, adding roughly 700 square feet of bookstore space.

"We'll have more green," Bryant said. "We'll have windows along the view wall, a 30-foot wine counter against those windows,



Verse & Vine combines an independent romance bookstore with a wine bar in a renovated 1906 building just off Front Street in downtown Poulsbo.

beautiful seating, crystal chandeliers, and ferns and plants."

Building a Sustainable Business

While the atmosphere may draw visitors in, Bryant said the bookstore-and-wine-bar concept was also designed to create a sustainable business.

"When having to run just a bookstore, we didn't think we could make that pencil revenue-wise," Bryant said. "So give people another reason to be here, and keep coming back on a regular basis, so that it's not just a once-a-month trip you might make into your local bookstore. You could come in multiple times a week and spend time because you don't have to buy a book every time you come in."



Jaci Bryant and Carmen Garringer toast the opening of Verse & Vine, their mother-daughter bookstore and wine bar.

Feature

Colorful romance titles line the shelves at Verse & Vine in downtown Poulsbo.

Garringer curates the bookstore's inventory, selecting both bestselling titles and personal favorites.

"Book-wise, a lot of it's just stuff that we really loved, and thought, oh, we have to have this in here," Garringer said. "Then just seeing what's new and upcoming, and what people are really excited about, and doing lots of research."

They opened with about 1,400 books.

Less than a month later, they had already sold through that inventory and reordered it twice.

"We've sold as much stock as we brought in, and then just had to bring it in twice over," Bryant said.

The beverage program received the same careful planning.

"We really went with what we thought tasted good and what we thought was going to be a good price-to-drinkability point," Bryant said. "We went with wines that came in kegs, so we've got eight wines on tap, keeping the waste down for us, the labor time down for us."

About half the wines come from Washington and the remainder from California, though Bryant hopes to continue expanding relationships with Pacific Northwest wineries willing to offer kegged wines.

The menu also includes nonalcoholic

spritzes and dirty sodas named after familiar romance tropes.

"You can get Enemies to Lovers and Meet Cute, and we just introduced our Shadow Daddy, which is a Spanish kalimotxo – Pinot Noir and Coca-Cola," Bryant said. "People are finding that fun. They're just excited about those little details."

More Than Romance

Although romance is the bookstore's focus, Bryant says many visitors arrive without realizing how broad the genre has become.

"We've had an occasion where someone is not aware that it's a romance-focused bookstore," Bryant said. "We've been able to do a little education on what romance books look like now, and how many different subgenres there are. I think that we've been able to convert some of them."

"They had no idea that you could read about two serial killers falling in love," Bryant said with a laugh.

The store has also become an unexpected gathering place for writers.

Through an online submission form, more than 50 local authors have already expressed interest in selling books or

participating in events.

"We didn't know there were that many even in the area," Bryant said. "We are going to focus over the next several months, when we've got the conservatory done, on showcasing our local authors and giving them a space too."

The response from the bookselling community has been equally encouraging.

"It's just its own community that we had no idea how big it was, or how many local authors are around here either," Garringer said. "So many local authors."

A Place to Belong

For Bryant and Garringer, the most meaningful measure of success isn't how many books or glasses of wine they sell. It's watching strangers become regulars and customers feel comfortable walking through the door alone.

"We hope people remember how they felt in here," Garringer said. "What we're trying to give them is just a space to feel comfortable and be welcomed."

That personal approach has become part of the business itself.

"We're getting feedback where people are mentioning that they were talking to the owners and there was a personal



Jaci Bryant and Carmen Garringer share a laugh inside Verse & Vine, their romance bookstore and wine bar.

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Carmen Garringer, and her mother Jaci Bryant, opened Verse & Vine in downtown Poulsbo in July.

connection and good conversation," Bryant said. "I think we want to make sure that we continue to give them that, and to do that, Carmen and I will be here every day that it's open."

As construction continues on the Conservatory and plans take shape for author events and expanded programming, Bryant says the vision extends well beyond

selling books.

"We want to be wildly successful," Bryant said. "Introduce romance books to new readers, bring events to the community, and champion our local author community and give them a space to be too."

In an era when independent bookstores have increasingly become gathering places as much as retail shops, Verse & Vine has found its niche by combining literature, hospitality and genuine conversation. For Bryant and Garringer, the goal isn't simply to sell the next bestseller. It's to create a place where people linger, connect and return – not because they need another book or another glass of wine, but because they've found a place where they belong. ■

Carmen Garringer carefully curates Verse & Vine's romance-focused book selection.





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Real Estate

Built on Dirt: The Foundation Underneath Kitsap's Entrepreneurial Future Runs Through Real Estate in Kitsap County

By **Tom Earnest** | Managing Broker, John L. Scott

Kitsap County has always had an entrepreneurial streak. Family-owned shops along historic downtown streets, contractors and marine trades, restaurants, wellness studios, professional offices, home-based businesses small business is woven into the identity of these communities. All of it rests on the same thing: a physical space someone had to lease, buy, build, or renovate.

Real estate rarely appears on a business plan's risk register. In this county, it should. Ask ten Kitsap entrepreneurs, what nearly derailed them in the first two years, and a surprising number will not say financing, staffing, or marketing. They will say space the lease that repriced, the storefront that came available six months too early, the home purchase that fell apart the same month the LLC was formed.

Location is a business decision.

For many entrepreneurs, the first major real estate decision is not buying a home. It is choosing where to launch or expand. That choice determines visibility, customer traffic, staffing pool, parking, accessibility, and long-term margin. A boutique in downtown Poulsbo, a professional office in Silverdale, a restaurant near the Bremerton waterfront, and a service business in Port Orchard each depend on a property that matches both the business model and the customer base and those are four genuinely different real estate markets.

Kitsap's appeal is easy to understand. The county offers proximity to Seattle and Tacoma while keeping a smaller community feel, so business owners can reach regional markets without losing the personal relationships that define local commerce.

The cycle runs in both directions.

Small businesses also shape residential real estate. Vibrant business districts make neighborhoods more attractive to buyers'

people who want to live near coffee shops, restaurants, childcare providers, medical offices, and grocery stores. Walkability and convenience support property values, which encourages further investment, which supports more storefronts.

The reverse is true too. When a Kingston broker hires a stager, commissions a photographer, orders a pre-inspection, or books a landscaper before a listing goes live, that's small-business spending flowing into other small businesses. Residential real estate here is not only an asset class. It is a distribution network for local dollars.

What the numbers signal?

Kitsap remains a seller's market, though a calmer one than the frenzy years. Recent NWMLS-based reporting puts the county's median home sale price near \$589,000 as of May 2026, up modestly year over year, with roughly two to three months of inventory and homes going pending in single-digit days.

Read that as an employer rather than a buyer. Tight inventory and fast absorption mean housing is not a bottleneck for demand, it is a bottleneck for labor. When a Silverdale manufacturer, a Poulsbo clinic, or a Bremerton restaurant group recruit, the median price, and the payment behind it become recruiting terms whether the employer likes it or not.

On the commercial side, Kitsap is unusually approachable for a first-time owner-user. Storefront, mixed-use, and small office buildings frequently trade between roughly \$250,000 and \$2 million figures a profitable small business can realistically underwrite. Leasing preserves cash and flexibility, which suits a business still testing its model.



Ownership converts an operating expense into equity and eliminates renewal risk; the single most common reason a beloved local business disappears from a downtown block. Between the two sites coworking Poulsbo's Vibe Coworks, Bremerton Workspace, flexible offices on Bainbridge real infrastructure for a county full of ferry-adjacent professionals and portable businesses.

Where the friction is.

Challenges remain rising lease rates, construction costs, permitting timelines, labor shortages, and thin commercial inventory.

Entrepreneurs weighing whether to lease, buy, renovate, or relocate need real guidance, because a poor real estate decision strains cash flow for years while the right one funds growth.

Bremerton's revitalization shows what's possible when housing, waterfront investment, ferry access, and small business move together. Poulsbo and Bainbridge show that local identity itself carries value independent shops and restaurants create a sense of place national chains cannot replicate, and that character shows up in the comparables.

Small businesses turn buildings into destinations and neighborhoods into communities. Real estate gives those ideas a floor to stand on.

What does this mean going into 2027?

Three practical takeaways for anyone building something here.

Underwrite your occupancy cost before you sign anything. Model rent or debt service at the top of your realistic range, not the bottom. Businesses that fail on real estate rarely fail on the first month's payment; they fail on year three's escalation.

Treat location data the way you treat sales data. Traffic counts, zoning trajectory, planned infrastructure, and neighboring tenant mix are knowable. Ask for them.

Get local, not general. Kitsap does not behave as one market. Bainbridge, Kingston, Silverdale, Bremerton, and Port Orchard have different buyer pools, different price trajectories, and different commercial fundamentals. County-level averages are a starting point, never an answer.

Entrepreneurship in Kitsap has always been about seeing value before the crowd does in a waterfront block, a tired building, an underserved corridor. The dirt is still where it starts. ■

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Feature

TBR on Tour

A Bookstore That Brings the Stories to You

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

A moody Victorian library isn't exactly what most people expect to find inside a trailer.

But step inside TBR on Tour and that is exactly what Suzie Vasquez has created: a mobile bookstore with dark wood shelves, a copper ceiling, candlelight and rows of books written exclusively by women.

The bookstore travels around the Kitsap Peninsula, bringing its curated collection to markets, wineries, breweries, book clubs and private events. But for Vasquez, TBR on Tour is about more than bringing books to readers. She wants the trailer to create a place where people linger, discover new stories and connect with one another.

"The first thing people do is just kind of look around," Vasquez said. "They're just in awe because the decor in there is very specific."

Women, in particular, often tell her they want to recreate the atmosphere at home.

"Women say constantly, 'I want to decorate my bedroom like this,' or 'I want a she-shed just like this,'" she said. "It has its own ambience."

A bookstore with a point of view

Inside the trailer, the books reflect Vasquez's vision.

"My bookshop was always going to be woman focused," she said. "Men's voices are amplified all over throughout time. Women's voices are always silenced."

TBR on Tour carries six genres written by women: romance, romantasy, dark romance, mystery/thriller, historical fiction and popular fiction.

Within those categories, Vasquez tries to give readers plenty of options.



After three decades in corporate America, Suzie Vasquez left her career to pursue her dream of opening a bookstore.



"In romance, I've got cowboy romances, sports romance, LGBTQ romance," she said. "People come up and say, 'Did you even realize there were this many romance authors?' I'm like, 'I had no idea.'"

The focus on women authors was part of Vasquez's plan from the beginning, even when others questioned it.

During a business class she took while developing the idea, Vasquez said the instructor pushed back when she explained that she intended to spotlight women authors.

"He said, 'Why would you do that?'" she said. "He said, 'Well, good luck to you. I hope that goes well.'"

"At first I was kind of second-guessing myself," she added. "Then I thought, no — that right there is the reason why you're gonna do what you do."

She has made one small concession to the men who accompany their partners to the trailer.

After noticing husbands and boyfriends waiting outside while women browsed, Vasquez added a spinning bookcase outside the trailer featuring books by male authors.

"So the male perspective is

there," she said. "It's just not in the trailer, which is a very feminine forward. It's not the main event"

From a dream to a bookstore on wheels

The idea for TBR on Tour began with a layoff.

Vasquez had spent 30 years in corporate America when she was laid off last September at age 61. The prospect of finding another corporate job was less appealing than it might have been earlier in her career.

"Being 61, number one, is really hard," she said. "When you fill out the resume, or you apply, and you know certain dates stand out to people. They get a feeling for your age, right? And so there was that issue, but also I didn't want to go back to corporate America — the political side of it, all the travel."

Her husband eventually asked what she would do if she could do anything.

"I said, 'Open a bookstore,'" Vasquez said. "I've always been a reader, an avid reader."

She began exploring what it would take to make that dream a reality. She took a business class through Kitsap Community Resources and started researching the cost of opening a traditional bookstore.

The price tag was about \$250,000.

Then her husband saw a video on TikTok featuring a mobile bookstore.

"One day my husband was on TikTok and he saw this mobile bookstore on a video, and he goes, 'Hey, what about this?'" Vasquez said. "Of course, I was all Miss Pouty. 'We don't even have a truck. We don't have a trailer. How will that even work?'"



Dark wood bookshelves filled with books line the interior of TBR on Tour, creating the feel of a cozy Victorian library.

Feature

By the next morning, she had reconsidered.

"I woke up and said, 'Okay, let's do it. Let's get a truck. Let's get a trailer,'" she said. "I said, 'But can you build the inside of this to look like a Victorian library? Like a Bridgerton-themed library?'"

Her husband agreed.

"I'll be gosh darned if that man did not build me a Victorian moody library," she said.

"Complete with a copper ceiling. He did things I had no idea he had the skills to do."

Vasquez took over the decorating.

"Give me a room to decorate and watch out, because I'm gonna do it," she said.

She found pieces at antique stores and on Facebook Marketplace, creating the atmosphere that has become one of the business's defining features.

Finding a community on the road

Vasquez initially envisioned TBR on Tour primarily traveling to markets and fairs. That changed after she attended a women's business retreat in Port Ludlow.

"Because of these professional



women and the networking we did and the educators that came in, my vision expanded 1,000%," she said. "Now I have a website. I have future business ideas that are not markets and fairs."

The business now works with wineries, breweries and other organizations and offers the mobile bookstore for everything from silent book clubs to private celebrations.

Vasquez has partnered with Silver City Taproom, 11 Winery and Sisters' Cider House, among others.

The trailer itself often becomes a gathering place.

"People will be walking through and they'll start chatting with each other. 'Oh my gosh, have you read that?' 'That book right there is amazing,'" she said.

Her book clubs have created another way for readers to connect.

One began with women who responded to a post on a Kitsap women's business page. The group brought together people from very different professions and backgrounds.

"These are all women I didn't know," she said. "Last night was our first meeting, and we had an Air Force lawyer, two legal

professionals, a biologist, a physician's assistant, an energy healer, and a realtor. All of us from all different walks of life came together to discuss a book."

The conversations don't necessarily stay focused on the book.

"Of course, when you're discussing the books and the topics within the book, it leads to your life," she said. "What's happening in this world, et cetera, et cetera."

More than selling books

The business has given Vasquez something she didn't expect





when she left corporate America.

"Opening this mobile bookshop has restored my faith in humanity," she said. "All you hear on the news and online are horrible people and stories, and yet the people I'm meeting are amazing."

She has watched customers enthusiastically recommend books to one another and authors approach her about carrying their work.

At a recent Bite of Kitsap event, an author brought Vasquez three signed copies of her new book simply to share.

"Where do you meet people like that in regular life?" Vasquez said.

After decades in corporate America, the interactions have changed her perspective.

"Now, most of the people – 90% of the people I meet – are just really good people," she said. "I love it. It's a good reminder that most people are good."

That sense of connection has also changed how Vasquez defines success.

"When I first started, success to me was doing four markets a month," she said. "Then I got a taste of eight times a month, then ten. I just think I want more – I'm having so much fun meeting people, being a part of the community, creating a connection within the community"

There are still the ordinary challenges of running a small

business – taxes, inventory, weather-dependent events and managing the operation largely on her own.

But the bottom line isn't her only measure.

"If I'm having fun, the people around me are having fun, and I'm able to place really cool books into really cool people's hands, that's successful," she said.

And perhaps that's the simplest explanation for why a bookstore on wheels works.

TBR on Tour doesn't require readers to find their way to a bookstore. Instead, Vasquez brings the bookstore to places where people are already gathering – and gives them another reason to step inside, linger and talk.

"I hope they take away a love of reading," Vasquez said. "Even a blind date with a book, where you're taking a chance and maybe you're going to find new authors. A feeling of connection with fantasy, with leaving reality as it is – because reality kind of sucks sometimes – and living stories that people have taken the time to write, that their heart's in too."

For Vasquez, the dream that began with a question over dinner has become more than a bookstore. It is a small Victorian library that happens to have wheels – and wherever it parks, it gives people a place to find a story, and sometimes, each other. ■



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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.

What If “Buy Local” Was Just the Beginning?

How Local Investment Networks are giving Washington communities another way to back the businesses they value.

By Lisa Smith | Executive Director, Washington State Microenterprise Association (WSMA)

Thriving Communities

Many of us have had the experience of buying a product from an inspired entrepreneur who shared just the right details to move us to purchase their wares. Or meeting a business owner so confident in their services that they readily support the competitor up the street – because they know that when their fellow businesses are strong, the whole community is stronger.

That's what I hear from community members when they talk about why they are so committed to investing in the entrepreneurs in their neighborhood who have brought so much life and beauty to their community.

We already know the power of buying local. But what if buying local was just the beginning?

Trusted Partners

Thriving business communities don't happen by accident. Kitsap County is fortunate to have trusted partners like the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance (KEDA), Kitsap Community Resources (KCR) BE\$T program, and Matchstick Lab, that have been working together for several years. They have

consistently been eager to share, collaborate, celebrate each other, make mistakes, lean on each other and connect the business owners they have served in common to the solutions that grow thriving communities.

These organizations are among over 130 Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs) throughout Washington State that are reachable 24/7 on Evergreen BizLink, helping entrepreneurs develop and strengthen their business plans, map out their marketing strategies, and work through their cash flow projections, so they will be ready for investment.

That foundation means that Kitsap is now poised and ready to explore another unique tool for growing thriving local economies: Local Investment Networks or (LINs).

Investing Close to Home

The businesses that benefit from local investment are often deeply connected to their communities. They want their customers to drink their local kombucha, enjoy their handmade fabrics,

be nourished by their fresh produce, or feel supported by their elder care services.

It's no wonder that the symbiotic connection between investor, entrepreneur, and customer can be so rich and rewarding.

I have often experienced the transformative power of investing in a local business. When people with the capacity to invest spend time with business owners who have navigated overwhelming hurdles and dedicated so much of their time and energy to their businesses, something powerful happens.

That spark – the belief that one business owner can achieve their vision with the financial support, expertise, and listening ear of a neighbor – is what prosperous local communities are all about.

It Works!

With the support of the Washington State University (WSU) Extension and others, communities across Washington are adopting this model and getting results.

Local investors are turning their attention toward their own Main Streets through LINs, creating impacts that extend

beyond any single investment.

These informal networks of investors are creating virtuous ripple effects in rural communities across our state. And often, the people participating are doing so because they are in love with their communities and with the businesses that make those places unique.

LINs offer another way for people who have the capacity to invest to participate directly in the economic future of the places they call home.

Could It Work in Kitsap?

Join us! Together with Matchstick Lab, we're bringing the WSU Extension team and leaders from Washington communities already using Local Investment Networks to Kitsap to share how their networks have evolved, the challenges they've encountered, and what they've made possible.

We'll explore how LINs are expanding the financing options available to local businesses – and whether this approach could make sense here.

If you've ever wondered how there might be a way to go beyond buy local and actually invest in the businesses you want to see thrive, come and explore with us! ■





July Membership Luncheon – BBQ & Bingo

Members gathered at the GKC's July Membership Luncheon for BBQ and bingo, all in support of the Greater Kitsap Chamber Foundation and scholarship program.

Thanks to the generosity of attendees, the Foundation raised nearly \$1,000, and lucky participants walked away with some awesome bingo prizes. ■



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GKC Around the Community

July Chamber: Off the Clock



On July 21, members and guests traveled across the Hood Canal Bridge to attend Chamber: Off the Clock at the Resort at Port Ludlow. It was a beautiful evening filled with waterfront views, great

food and drinks, and meaningful connections. Attendees from across Kitsap County and the Port Ludlow region had the chance to meet, connect, and form relationships that make our region even stronger. ■



GKC Primary Mixer



On Tuesday, July 28, the Chamber hosted its inaugural GKC Primary Mixer, which connected local business leaders with candidates in the upcoming

primary election. Candidates had the opportunity to learn directly from Chamber members about the issues most affecting Kitsap businesses. ■







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Byron Street Bites Ribbon Cutting

One of our favorite things at the Greater Kitsap Chamber is seeing our members' businesses grow and thrive, so we were more than happy to join the Old Town Mercantile for the opening of



its new food trailer, Byron Street Bites on Thursday, July 23. The food trailer is conveniently located just outside the Old Town Mercantile and offers a variety of delicious options from Thursday through Monday. ■

What an Accident Prevention Program Is and Why Every Employer Needs One

As a recipient of the Small Business Outreach Grant, the Greater Kitsap Chamber, in partnership with Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, will provide valuable information for businesses on how they can strengthen their business and take advantage of L&I resources. Stay tuned for in-person trainings over the coming year.

Every employer in Washington state is required to create and maintain a written Accident Prevention Program (APP) to address safety and health hazards in the workplace.

Many employers consider their APP to be the cornerstone of their overall safety program, but what exactly is an APP, and why is it so essential?

What Is an Accident Prevention Program?

An Accident Prevention Program is a plan of action that involves both workers and management in maintaining a safe workplace.

An effective APP identifies and controls workplace hazards and clearly outlines procedures for responding to injuries, unsafe conditions, and workplace emergencies.

By proactively addressing risks, employers can prevent accidents before they occur and ensure that, when incidents do happen, they are handled



consistently and appropriately. You must establish, supervise, and enforce your accident prevention program in a manner that is effective in practice.

Why Do You Need an APP?

Under the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) every employer is required to have an APP.

During a DOSH inspection, employers may face citations and monetary penalties if serious hazards are identified and no APP exists or if the APP has major deficiencies.

Beyond regulatory compliance, an APP plays a critical role in improving workplace safety.

A well-designed program helps prevent costly injuries and keeps employees healthy and working.

APPs can also help control



industrial insurance (workers' compensation) costs. Since an employer's premium rates are influenced by injury claims, preventing accidents can directly benefit a business's bottom line.

What Should Be Included in an APP?

For many employers, a General Industry or Small Business APP template will meet basic requirements.

However, because every workplace is different, APPs must be tailored to the specific hazards and operations of each business, and additional elements may be required depending on the industry.

At a minimum, all Accident Prevention Programs must be:

- Written and available to employees
- Customized to the specific worksite and tasks performed

In partnership with the Department of Labor & Industries for employer outreach and education.

- Inclusive of employee safety orientation and ongoing training
- Supported by safety meetings or a safety committee, as required
- Actively implemented, supervised, and enforced

How Do You Know If Your APP Is Effective?

An APP is considered effective when regular and predictable hazards are identified and addressed, and when serious or recurring injuries are not occurring.

L&I offers a wide range of tools and support to help employers build and maintain effective APPs.

To learn more and access L&I's resources, visit: Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/create-a-safety-program/accident-prevention-program. ■



New and Renewing Memberships for July

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

Community Connector

Kitsap Mall (1983)

Growth

Bremerton School District (1983)

Puget Sound Naval Shipyard & IMF (1999)

Main Street

Kitsap Public Utility District (1988)

Kitsap Regional Library (2001)

Paratransit Services (1993)

YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap Counties (2010)

Business

BudgetYOU! (2024)

Bremerton Northern Model Railroad (2024)

Alzheimer's Association, Washington State Chapter (2022)

Aqua Tech Marine Services Inc. (2007)

Banks Consulting Northwest Inc. (2026)

Bremerton Backpack Brigade (2019)

Bremerton Central Lions Club (2011)

Coach Paul J (2023)

Copper Financial Group (2026)

Deborah Gates, JD, LLM, Attorney-at-Law (2024)

Flagship Inn (2003)

MobileREMs (2026)

Mise en Place Design, LLC (2024)

Oyster Bay Inn (2012)

St. Vincent de Paul, Bremerton (2011)

The Agency- Bainbridge Island (2025)

Weiter Manufacturing (2026)

WorkSource Kitsap County (2016)

ZenBusiness (2025)

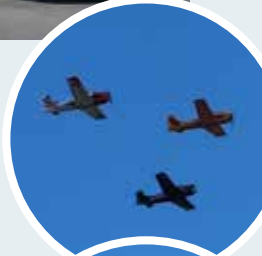
Thank you for your continued support of the Greater Kitsap Chamber through your membership. Your commitment to the Chamber plays a vital role in strengthening our business community and fostering growth, connection, and advocacy across the region.

Bremerton Air Show



On July 11 & 12 aviation enthusiasts from Kitsap and beyond attended the Bremerton Air Show to watch as planes, helicopters, and para-commandos flew through the sky. With a full lineup of classic military and civilian aircraft, there

was something for everyone to enjoy. The Greater Kitsap Chamber was a proud sponsor of the event. ■



Tessera's Annual Golf Tournament

The Chamber was honored to play in Tessera's annual golf tournament benefiting Bremerton Foodline and

Special Olympics Washington on June 25. We might not have been the best golfers, but we did collect 778 pounds of food for the food drive! ■



The Marketing Momentum You Can't See

By Amy Yaley |
COO of Ward Media

"Business has slowed down. We need to start marketing again."

I've heard some version of that sentence a lot lately.

It's understandable. When business is good, marketing feels less urgent. When the market becomes uncertain, it can feel like an easy expense to cut.

But there's a problem with that approach.

What if the slowdown is happening because you stopped marketing before the slowdown ever arrived?

Marketing has a momentum that isn't always easy to see. You don't necessarily notice it building month to month, but over time, consistent visibility creates awareness, familiarity and trust. Then, when a customer needs what you sell, your business is already familiar to them.

When you stop showing up, that momentum doesn't disappear overnight. But it begins to fade.

The Marketing Roller Coaster

I've seen businesses get caught in the same cycle over and over.

Business is good, so marketing gets cut.

Visibility declines.

Business slows down.

Marketing starts again.

Business improves.

Marketing gets cut again.

Marketing isn't a light switch. You can't simply turn it on when business slows down and expect immediate results.

"I Wish I Knew You Were Here"

Recently, a business owner told me something that really stuck with me. His customers often tell him, "I wish I knew you were here

sooner."

Think about that for a minute.

That's not a product problem. It's not a service problem. It's not necessarily a pricing problem.

It's a visibility problem.

And yet, his response was to consider pulling back on marketing while he saved money for a new sign.

A new sign may absolutely be a worthwhile investment. But if customers are already saying, "I wish I knew you were here sooner," the bigger problem is awareness.

And in this particular case, there was another challenge. He told me that people are sometimes confused about what the business actually does because of its name.

Now we have two marketing problems: **People don't know you're there. And when they do find you, they may not immediately understand what you do.**

That's not a reason to stop marketing. It's a reason to make the marketing clearer.

Awareness Comes Before Action

Marketing has several jobs.

First, people need to know you exist.

Then they need to understand what you do.

Then they need a reason to trust you.

Only after those things happen are they likely to become a customer.

A new sign can help with visibility for the people who drive past your business. But a consistent marketing strategy can introduce your business to people long before they ever drive down your street.

That's the difference between a sign and a marketing system.

Your sign works when someone is nearby.

Your marketing should work when they're not.

What About an Uncertain Market?

I recently heard another version of the same concern:

"The market is really uncertain right now. I have to pause."

I understand the instinct. Businesses have to watch their cash flow, and sometimes budgets need to change.

But uncertainty can also create opportunity. When businesses pull back, those that continue showing up have an opportunity to stand out. Customers still have needs and still make purchases. **The question is: Who will they remember when they're ready?**

Being strategic with your marketing during uncertain times is different from simply spending more. It may mean focusing on fewer channels, sharpening your message, adjusting your audience or measuring your results more carefully.

But disappearing completely can have a cost that doesn't show up on a budget spreadsheet.

Fix Before You Quit

When marketing isn't producing the results you want, don't automatically assume the answer is to stop.

Ask better questions.

Are we reaching the right people?

Is our message clear?

Do people understand what we do?

Are we showing up consistently?

Are we giving the strategy enough time to work?

The answer isn't always to do more. Sometimes it's to fix what you're already doing before you quit.

The Bottom Line

Marketing momentum is easy to ignore when business is good and easy to regret when business is slow.

That's why I believe the better question isn't, "When should we start marketing again?"

It's: "What can we do today to make sure we're still being remembered when the market improves?"

Because marketing isn't just about filling today's sales pipeline.

It's about making sure that when tomorrow's customer is ready to buy, they already know your name. ■

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



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Recruitment

No Handoff Required: The Connection Between Recruiting and Onboarding



Why onboarding begins before the offer, and why silence afterward may cost you the hire

By Monica Blackwood President & CEO West Sound Workforce

Many employers treat recruitment and onboarding like a relay race: managers and supervisors recruiting carry the baton until the offer is accepted, then hands it to HR for forms and first-day orientation. Candidates, though don't see a handoff. They see one continuous experience.

The job posting, interview, office tour, offer process and first weeks all answer the same questions: Can I picture myself here? Will I have what I need to succeed? Do I belong?

It's safe to say, then, that onboarding does not begin when a new employee fills out tax forms. It begins during recruitment, with the very first conversation.

The Interview Is Already Onboarding

During an interview, you evaluate a candidate's experience, skills and fit.

Meanwhile, the candidate evaluates everything else. They notice how they are greeted, whether the interview starts on time, how employees speak to one another and whether stated values show up in everyday behavior.

Before an offer is made, they are already imagining what working there would feel like.

A strong interview does more

than review job duties. It shows candidates why the role matters, who they will work with, what the culture feels like and what success looks like.

Give them enough of the real picture to see themselves in it. Don't stage a polished performance or hide the difficult parts.

Honest expectations build trust and help candidates make better decisions before they arrive wondering whether they've accepted a different job.

The Danger Zone Between 'Yes' and Day One

The offer has been accepted. Everyone celebrates. Then... silence.

This gap is prime time to lose your hire. Their employer may counteroffer. Another company may call.

Doubt may creep in. If they hear only about background checks and paperwork, the energy that led them to say yes can disappear.

Stay in conversation. A welcome note from their manager or company leadership, an introduction to a future teammate or a quick first-day update keeps the relationship warm. Do not overwhelm them; simply reinforce that they made a good decision and that their arrival matters.

Paperwork Is Necessary. It Is Not the Point.

Employment forms, policies and required training matter. But no one has ever felt a sense of belonging because they completed an I-9 on time.

True onboarding moves a new employee from outsider to confident, connected contributor. Research on organizational socialization points to role clarity, confidence and social acceptance as key parts of that transition. It also reinforces the value of mentoring and support inside the organization.

For a small business, that does not require an expensive program or glossy welcome box. It simply requires intention. Before the employee arrives, make sure the basics are ready: workspace, equipment, system access and a plan. Identify who will answer questions and connect the employee with the people they need. Map out what they should learn on the first day, during the first week and by the end of the first month. Share the organization's story, too. How did the company begin? Why does the work matter? Where is it going? People connect more deeply when they understand the larger story, and their part in it.

The First Day Is a Milestone, Not the Finish Line

Even a highly capable new hire will not become fully comfortable or productive in one day. They need time to learn the

work, build relationships and decode the unwritten rules of the workplace.

Onboarding should continue for weeks and, depending on the role, for several months. SHRM describes it as integrating an employee into the company and its culture while providing what they need to become productive. Check in regularly. Ask what is clear, what is confusing and where more support would help. A ten-minute conversation can uncover a small frustration before it grows into a resignation.

Gallup found that only 12% of employees strongly agreed that their organization did a great job of onboarding. Effective onboarding builds relationships, connects employees to purpose and shows how their strengths contribute.

Recruitment does not end when the candidate says yes. When recruiting and onboarding operate as one process, employees begin with clearer expectations, stronger relationships and greater confidence. They arrive seeing where they fit, and with more reasons to stay. ■

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.

Olympic College's Bremerton campus serves students from across Kitsap and Mason counties.

Q & A Executive

Meet Dr. Chantae Recasner President of Olympic College

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For Dr. Chantae Recasner, education is more than a career. It is a pathway to freedom, opportunity and the ability to shape one's own future. A first-generation college graduate who began her career as a high school English teacher, Recasner has spent her professional life working to make higher education more accessible, empowering and responsive to the people it serves.

Now, as president of Olympic College, Recasner brings that commitment to Kitsap and Mason counties. She sees Olympic College as both an educational institution and an economic engine – one that prepares students for careers, supports local employers and helps strengthen the communities around it. As she begins her presidency, her focus is on building resilience, strengthening community partnerships and keeping students at the center of the college's mission.

In this Executive Q&A, Recasner discusses her path to higher education, her vision

for Olympic College, the changing needs of students and employers, the role of technology and AI, and what she hopes success will look like for the college five years from now.

For our readers who may not know you yet, can you tell us a little about your background and the experiences that shaped your career in higher education?

I am a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, and my career in education actually began as a high school English teacher at Alcee Fortier High School. My journey into higher education began while I was a doctoral student at the University of Cincinnati.

Like many graduate students have experienced, college budget cuts led to a reduction in my graduate assistantship stipend. Because I needed additional income for basic needs, I started looking for additional work. A peer in my program told me she was an adjunct instructor at **Cincinnati State**



Dr. Chantae Recasner is the new president of Olympic College. **Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio**

Technical & Community College and encouraged me to apply, so I did. When I interviewed with the Department Chair for English at the time, she told me they were searching for a full-time faculty member. I put my name in the hat, and after weeks of the search process, I was hired as a tenure-track, full-time Instructor of English and Composition.

I loved teaching! Still do. I love learning! But as a first-generation college graduate, a K-12 educator in one of the most under-resourced educational systems in the nation, and a faculty member, I experienced and saw just how damaging our well-intended schooling practices can be for so many individuals.

My schooling experiences were defined heavily by the duality of determination and fear. I knew I had a penchant for high performance, but I had no idea how to

anticipate the next thing. If you're from a community like New Orleans, fundamental to your ability to survive is your ability to read people, read the room, read the world in a way that gives you an edge, a leg up. As a first-generation college student, I didn't have that leg up, and it scared me to death.

School was never inherently safe for me, but learning empowered me to chart my next steps. It gave me confidence and more certainty about my future. I knew and saw so many people who wanted the same thing. So, I committed my life to education with a determination to make pathways to and through higher education easier, safer and more empowering for anyone who chooses it.

Education is freedom because it enables choice. It gives individuals greater power to direct and construct the course of their lives rather than just surviving it.

What drew you to Olympic College, and what made this the right opportunity at this point in your career?

What initially drew me to Olympic College was that it profiled similarly to the last college I led in terms of structure – a multicampus institution with a similar student headcount and program emphasis. But what impressed me most and ultimately convinced me that OC was where I wanted to be was the deep invested engagement the college receives from the Kitsap and Mason county communities.

Olympic College is a place where everyone belongs, and it is committed to ensuring equity and access are not just virtue signals. People from all backgrounds and experiences walk through the doors of OC and become empowered to change their lives. They then go on to work in this community, sometimes even coming back to OC to support others in their own transformative journeys.

It helps that we get to inspire people from infancy through the work of our Sophia Bremer Child Development Center, but at its core, OC is a college with heart. Care is central to how we serve, and I love that!

Olympic College has a long history of serving Kitsap County and the surrounding region. As you begin your presidency, what have you learned about the college's strengths, and where do you see opportunities for growth?

There are so many strengths at Olympic College that I couldn't possibly name them all, but I can tell you there are at least 1,000:

our employees.

Our employees are among our greatest strengths because they are deeply invested in the success of their college. Many are Olympic College alumni. Others are parents, grandparents, cousins or family members of current students and graduates. They serve with conviction, heart and care, always keeping our students at the center of the work.

I tend to use analogies, and lately I've been comparing Olympic College to the solar system. Our students are the sun, and our employees are the planets surrounding them. As president, I get to be the gravitational pull, helping keep the system aligned and focused on our central purpose: student success.

So, as much as this profile and others may make me more visible, part of my mission is to keep the focus where it belongs: on our students. They are what make Olympic College shine.

Our greatest opportunities lie in continuing to fulfill that mission while responding to forces that are changing higher education and the communities we serve. Demographic shifts are creating new enrollment challenges. Technology is advancing rapidly. Workforce needs are evolving locally, regionally and nationally. And today's learners need teaching and learning models that reflect the realities of their lives.

Our opportunity is to remain agile and innovative while staying grounded in who we are: a college committed to helping students achieve their educational goals and creating opportunity for the communities we serve.

What are your top priorities during your first year as president, and what goals do you hope to accomplish during this transition period?

My top priority is to strengthen the college's resilience in the face of the many challenges affecting higher education, including those I mentioned earlier. Building that resilience will strengthen our ability to meet the needs of the communities we serve in Kitsap and Mason counties.

Fortunately, we have strong guideposts for where to focus our energy. One example is our Health Sciences Expansion, which has been exceptional. I'm not sure the broader community realizes just how significant that progress has been. New academic programs often take years to develop and launch. At Olympic College, we have

launched six health care programs in just the past two to three years.

We have completed Phase 1 of that expansion and are moving into Phase 2 with the launch of EMT this fall. We have a lot to celebrate, but we also have a lot to protect. Our region has made a significant investment in these programs, and we have a responsibility to ensure they remain strong, sustainable and able to meet the workforce needs they were created to address.

That is where resilience becomes more than a concept. It is about protecting what is working, strengthening what we have built and making thoughtful decisions about what comes next.

And I have a great team of strategists helping lead that work. We're on it.

You are the first African American and third woman to serve as president of Olympic College. What does this historic milestone mean to you personally and professionally?

Mae Jemison was also a first. So, I'll quote her: "There have been lots of other women who had the talent and ability before me. I think this can be seen as an affirmation that we're moving ahead. And I hope it means that I'm just the first in a long line." I appreciate that this is a point of honor in the story of OC. However, I remain more impressed that there are students at OC who are the first on many accounts. They are the real big deals!

Olympic College President Dr. Chantae Recasner speaks at a college event.



Executive Q & A

Community colleges play an important role in workforce development. How do you see Olympic College partnering with local businesses and industries to prepare students for the careers and skills needed in the future?

Community and corporate partnerships are essential to Olympic College's future. Our role is to listen closely to employers, understand how workforce needs are changing and build pathways that prepare students for meaningful careers while strengthening our regional economy.

That work is especially important in a challenging fiscal environment. Strong, long-term partnerships with businesses, industries and community organizations can help us align programs with workforce demand, expand access to training and make the best use of our shared resources.

We have already seen what is possible through our Health Sciences Expansion partnership with Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, and we want to build on that momentum across Kitsap and Mason counties.

Continuing Education is another area of opportunity. We are seeing growth in non-credit courses that help people build skills, explore career fields and, in some cases, transition into for-credit programs. We are also expanding customized training with local employers, including partnerships with organizations such as Kitsap Transit around emerging workforce needs like electrical theory and electric vehicle maintenance.

OC not only provides training pathways to work, we also provide work in the community. We are an important employer and agent of economic development.

Kitsap County's economy continues to evolve with growth in industries such as health care, advanced manufacturing, maritime, technology and construction. What role do you see Olympic College playing in supporting the region's economic future?

Our friends at the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance like to say that Olympic College is an economic engine for our region, and I think that speaks to the responsibility we have as a public institution. The students in our classrooms and labs today will soon be the nurses, technicians,

engineers, tradespeople, business leaders and innovators shaping this region's future.

Our role is to stay closely connected to the needs of Kitsap and Mason counties and adapt as those needs evolve. That means keeping our programs relevant, ensuring strong learning outcomes and helping students complete their credentials and move successfully into the workforce or further education.

We are already investing in areas critical to the region's future, including health care, advanced manufacturing, maritime, technology and the trades. Just as important, we must prepare students to adapt as industries and technologies change.

If we do that well, Olympic College will continue to connect students to family-wage careers, employers to the talent they need, and our communities to a stronger, more resilient regional economy.

Students today face many challenges beyond the classroom, including affordability, balancing work and school, and access to support services. How is Olympic College working to help students succeed?

We know that student success depends on more than what happens in the classroom. Many of our students are balancing work, family responsibilities and the rising cost of basic needs, including food, housing, childcare and transportation.

Olympic College has made wraparound support a priority, and that work was recognized with a commendation during our recent accreditation review. Through our Resource Center, students can access food, school supplies, emergency grants, referrals and other support. Demand continues to grow, with an estimated 15,000 student visits/services provided in 2026, up from 13,000 in 2025. Our food pantry is also reaching more students each year, with 1,300 students served during the 2025 – 26 academic year.

Transportation is another important barrier. Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, we are piloting a partnership with Kitsap Transit to provide free bus passes to every Olympic College student.

Our goal is simple: remove as many barriers as we can so students can stay enrolled, complete their education and achieve the goals that brought them to Olympic College in the first place.

Your background includes teaching and learning, operational excellence and building stronger, more equitable communities. How do those priorities influence your vision and leadership approach at Olympic College?

These aspects of my background intersect, or, shall I say, align, quite simply around intention. Success in leadership isn't a matter of luck or chance. Intention and planning allow us to accomplish much that otherwise might not be attained.

Instructional success, operational excellence and community building all require design. They require intention. I don't count on luck. I've never been much of a gambler. I prefer strategy, because even when you fail, strategy leaves a trail that allows you to understand what happened, learn from it and still grow. Haphazard dependence on luck or fortune is too risky and can leave you empty-handed.

So, I don't take risks when it comes to people's dreams. Our students are worthy of both our attention and our intention. My background helps me make sure they get both.

Higher education is changing rapidly with advances in technology, including artificial intelligence, and evolving expectations from employers. How is Olympic College adapting to prepare students for this changing environment?

Rapid advances in technology, particularly artificial intelligence, present both significant opportunities and important challenges for higher education. Our responsibility is to help students understand how to use these tools effectively while continuing to develop the critical thinking, creativity and judgment that employers value.

Before my arrival, Olympic College formed an AI Task Force with faculty from a variety of disciplines and instructional settings. The group conducted research, surveyed the college community and developed guidance for the responsible use of AI in the classroom, including clear expectations for both students and faculty.

We are also exploring how AI can improve college operations and create efficiencies while protecting the security and integrity of our data and systems.

Technology will continue to evolve, and so will the workplace. Our job is to make sure students are prepared not simply to use new

tools, but to think critically about them, adapt to change and bring the human skills that technology cannot replace.

Strong community partnerships are essential to a thriving college. How do you hope to strengthen relationships with local employers, civic leaders and community organizations throughout Kitsap County?

Strong partnerships begin with listening. As a new president, one of my priorities is to spend time with employers, civic leaders, tribal partners and community organizations across Kitsap County to better understand both the opportunities and the challenges facing our region.

Olympic College has an important role to play as a convener. We can bring people together around shared priorities, connect community needs with educational opportunities and create partnerships that extend beyond any single program or initiative.

I also want those relationships to be sustained, not transactional. Whether we are working together on student support, economic development, cultural and civic

engagement, or new educational pathways, the strongest partnerships are built over time through trust, communication and shared purpose.

Olympic College is deeply rooted in this community, and I want us to continue showing up as a partner that listens, contributes and helps bring people together to strengthen the region we all serve.

Looking ahead five years, what would success look like for Olympic College under your leadership?

Well, for starters, I'm still here! :) But seriously, success looks like more seats filled at our commencement ceremonies because more students are completing their goals. It looks like students reaching back out to tell us that their experience at Olympic College changed their lives. It looks like our employees proudly saying OC is one of the best places to work.

It also looks like thriving partnerships with our community, workforce and university partners; a stable budget and strong financial footing; and a college that continues to respond to the needs of our region with confidence and purpose.

And, of course, it looks like a wonderful



Dr. Chantae Recasner congratulates an Olympic College graduate during the college's 2026 commencement ceremony.

85th anniversary celebration – one that honors how far Olympic College has come and gives us even more reason to be excited about where we're going.

What keeps you motivated in the work you do?

I don't need motivation. I am fulfilling my purpose, and for me, that is divine. Even on my hardest days, that sense of purpose gives me a joy that surpasses all understanding. ■

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KEYNOTE**

Building a Washington Where Small Business Wins

A candid look at what it takes to help small businesses start, grow, and succeed — and what we can all do to build it.

**1:00–5:00
AFTERNOON
EVENT**

Business Forward 2026

Discussions, connections and resources to help your business thrive.



Dahlia Cove Studio: Where Creativity and Connection Bloom

Some places invite you to slow down the moment you step through the door. Dahlia Cove Studio is one of them.

Nestled in the heart of historic Port Gamble, Dahlia Cove Studio was born from a mother-and-daughter dream to create a place where people could gather, celebrate, and reconnect. Inspired by a memorable afternoon tea Yvonne Foster and her daughter Jalynn shared together, they set out to build a space that blends creativity, hospitality, and meaningful experiences into every visit.

Today, guests can enjoy an elegant four-course afternoon tea, pour their own custom candles at the interactive Candle Bar, or host life's special moments in the cozy Bloom Room. Whether it's a birthday celebration, bridal shower, girls' outing, or simply an afternoon away from the everyday, every experience is thoughtfully designed to encourage conversation, creativity, and connection.

The name Dahlia Cove reflects another passion close to their hearts. At their North Kitsap home, they cultivate hundreds of varieties of dahlias and other seasonal blooms,

bringing the beauty and joy of the garden into the studio throughout the year.

More than just a destination, Dahlia Cove Studio is a place where memories are made – one cup of tea, one candle, and one shared moment at a time. It's the kind of place that reminds us that slowing down together is something worth celebrating.

Meet the Maker Behind Dahlia Cove: Yvonne Foster

Favorite tea on the menu:

Vanilla Horchata Rooibos

Most popular candle

fragrance: Volcano

How many varieties of dahlias

do you grow each year? 200

One thing first-time visitors are always surprised by:

The decor, how we capture a whimsical and elevated experience in this historic home.

Your favorite part about

welcoming guests into the

studio: Greeting every guest with a smile and knowing our guests have chosen to spend special moments and everyday occasions with us.

If you could describe Dahlia Cove Studio in three words, what would they be? Unique, Memorable, Flavorful. ■



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Hit Back: Your Business' Preparedness Playbook

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

September is National Preparedness Month. While many of the advertisements and promotions you'll see revolve around personal preparedness (and those are important), we can also do so much more for our businesses and organizations.



The recent fires in Spokane are a stark reminder of how quickly a crisis can escalate. Emergency evacuations, damaged property, and in some cases loss of life don't come with warnings; they don't come at convenient times; and while many aren't preventable, the response and recovery can always be improved.

Consider this month my Preparedness Playbook for your business or organization. It's broken into three sections: Prevention, Response, and Recovery. By improving each section even a little, you will go a long way to saving property, dollars, and lives.

Prevention

Reduce Hazards: Perils are the bad things we encounter: fires, cyber-attacks, and injured employees are examples. Hazards are those things that increase the likelihood of a peril occurring. In my examples, those might include poor housekeeping, lack of proper computer hygiene (like lack of training or outdated maintenance), and lack of safety equipment.

You can reduce hazards with proper quality control. Constantly audit all those pesky details that we all know are necessary to prevent perils from occurring. The human element of this is normally apathy and speed. In our lack of caring or desire to get things done faster, hazards are overlooked. Don't let that happen to you.

Questions: How's your organizational housekeeping? Is everything put away to

avoid trips and falls? How about the use of chemicals and personal protective equipment? Has everyone been trained in proper uses? How updated are your policies and procedures, and are they communicated? When was the last time you did an analysis of your technology? Prevention is the least expensive form of the risk

management process. Preventing a peril is always better than being forced to respond and recover from one.

Response

Insurance: I'm sure everyone reading this column has business insurance. The better question is, how confident are you that it's right?

Insurance is basically sold as a commodity. For most small businesses and organizations, there may not be a dedicated agent. It's very easy for insurance to be incorrectly written, become obsolete, and fail to respond when it's needed most.

Insurance is the ultimate response tool, but making sure it's correct before the peril is critical. While you may fully trust your insurance agent, make sure you're discussing your most crucial concerns and how they are (or aren't) covered in your policy.

Strategic Planning: While every business and organization carries insurance, almost nobody has a strategic business continuity plan. This is the "break glass" plan for when the "you-know-what" hits the fan.

This plan – which should be reviewed annually – includes areas around accountability and responsibility; redundancies (especially human ones); crucial contact information; and the location of emergency and life-saving equipment. While this planning may not be the most fun

thing to create, it's essential to quickly and effectively respond to a crisis. Without one, you're just making things up on the fly.

Questions: When was the last time you had your insurance reviewed by an independent expert not selling you the policy? When was the last time you reviewed your business continuity plan (or do you have one)? Are all your employees trained in First Aid/CPR? Do you have a defibrillator on site? Does everyone know who's in charge if the owner isn't there?

Recovery

How Fast Can You Get Back: Days not operating at full strength are expensive. Think of your own business or organization: how much would it cost if you couldn't operate for two weeks? A month?

Recovery is predicated on how well you've put together your prevention and response plans. The better you've reduced the hazards, and the more comprehensive and well-communicated your plan, the faster your recovery – saving tens to hundreds – of thousands of dollars, plus your employees' ability to earn income.

You need to understand your minimum recovery time. Determine the minimum amount of time you can be inoperable before it really hurts. Is it three days? A week? A month? One of my clients once told me – it was one hour.

Use reverse engineering to create your Business Continuity Plan. Identify your biggest exposure to perils; analyze the impact and probability of them; set controls into place to better prevent and respond to crises; finance the risk through proper insurance; and then monitor and stay current.

Use this month to commit to your employees and their families, and your customers and clients. Start with creating plans around prevention, response, and recovery, and then put them into action.

It's not a matter of if a crisis hits you, it's when. Be ready to hit back. ■





Understanding Obstructive Sleep Apnea and Surgical Treatment Options

By Dr. Christopher England | The Doctors Clinic Salmon Medical Center

Obststructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is a significant medical condition caused by a physical obstruction of the airway during sleep. This blockage prevents patients from achieving the restorative sleep necessary for health and well-being.

While OSA affects both adults and children, the underlying physical mechanisms and treatment approaches often differ significantly between age groups.

The Risks of Untreated OSA

Left untreated, OSA can have profound health implications. In the short term, patients frequently experience debilitating daytime fatigue. Over the long term, the risks for adults escalate to include hypertension, myocardial infarction (heart attack), stroke, depression, and an increased risk of dementia. In pediatric cases, untreated apnea often manifests as impaired concentration, hyperactivity, and declining academic performance.

The Standard of Care

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy remains the established standard of care. Because it is non-invasive and highly effective when utilized correctly, it is typically the first-line treatment recommended for adults following a diagnosis via a polysomnogram (sleep study).

When to Consider Sleep Surgery

Despite its efficacy, studies indicate that approximately 30% of patients are unable to tolerate CPAP therapy. For these individuals, sleep surgery offers a vital alternative to improve sleep quality, reduce condition severity, or enhance CPAP tolerance. In certain instances, surgery may eliminate the need

for CPAP entirely. Success rates vary based on individual health factors, and most insurance providers require a documented trial of CPAP before approving surgical intervention.

The Candidacy and Consultation Process

Determining candidacy for sleep surgery involves a systematic evaluation. First, patients must have a recent sleep study (typically within the last two years) to confirm the diagnosis. If CPAP has been attempted without sufficient benefit or tolerance, a patient may be referred to Otolaryngology (ENT) by their primary care provider or a sleep medicine specialist.

The Path Forward

If you or a loved one are struggling with CPAP, you are not out of options. The path forward begins with a current sleep study to accurately assess the state of your condition. From there, a consultation with a primary care provider or an ENT specialist can help determine if surgical alternatives are the right choice for your health and lifestyle.

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

“ OSA is a serious medical issue which can result in an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and even dementia if left untreated. I'm excited because we are now able to help many of these patients find a solution for their OSA if they've been unable to tolerate CPAP, so we can help them improve their quality of life, their sleep quality, and also decrease their risk of future medical conditions. It isn't for everyone, but my hope is that we can help a significant number of these patients by offering alternatives to CPAP for the right patient. Some of the newer options, like Inspire®, are also better tolerated and have better outcomes than what we have previously been able to offer.” — **Dr. Christopher England, The Doctors Clinic**



Bremerton shipyard lands \$321K federal grant



Safe Boats International in Bremerton will receive more than \$321,000 in federal funding to expand workforce training as part of \$5.2 million awarded to six Washington shipyards.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration awarded Safe Boats International LLC \$321,474 through its fiscal year 2026 Small Shipyard Grant Program. The company plans to use the money to launch an aluminum welding and fabrication training program.

The investment includes 17 welding machines, eight welding booths, an air filtration system and training equipment such as clamps and hoists.

The Bremerton award is one of six grants announced for Washington shipyards by U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., ranking member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

The Small Shipyard Grant Program provides funding

for capital improvements, equipment modernization, facility upgrades and workforce training intended to improve the productivity and competitiveness of smaller U.S. shipyards.

Washington shipyards received a combined \$5.23 million in the latest round.

Delta Marine Industries Inc. of Seattle received the largest Washington award at nearly \$1.51 million for a 620-ton travelift capable of moving large vessels. BRIX Marine Inc. in Port Angeles received nearly \$1.26 million for four 10-ton remote-controlled overhead cranes.

Rozema's Boat Works Inc. in Mount Vernon received \$938,176 for metal fabrication equipment, including a CNC router table, CNC press brake and mechanical shear. Arrow Launch Service Inc. in Port Angeles received \$750,000 for a 75-ton travelift.

Everett Ship Repair LLC received \$456,216 for electrical

improvements supporting a new 35,000-ton floating drydock and training for employees on production processes.

Cantwell has advocated for increased federal investment in the Small Shipyard Grant Program and other programs aimed at strengthening the domestic maritime industry. As chair of the Commerce Committee, she helped lead the 2022 reauthorization of the Maritime Administration, which authorized \$30 million for the program. Congress later increased its authorized funding by 50% as part of the fiscal year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act.

The grants come amid

broader efforts to increase U.S. shipbuilding capacity and address workforce shortages across the maritime industry. At a Senate Commerce Committee hearing in October 2025, industry representatives said federal investments in equipment, infrastructure and employee training can help shipyards add workers and expand apprenticeship and career-development programs.

For Kitsap County, the Safe Boats award represents a direct federal investment in the region's maritime manufacturing workforce, with the funding focused specifically on developing aluminum welding and fabrication skills.

Olympic College launches new computer science associate degree

Olympic College will launch a new associate degree in computer science this fall, expanding its technology programs and creating another pathway for Kitsap County students to pursue careers in the field without leaving the region.

The Computer Science Associate Degree will begin in fall 2026 and provide instruction in programming, software

development, computer systems and problem-solving through classroom and hands-on learning.

College officials said the program is designed both for students preparing to enter the workforce and those planning to continue their education.

"With this addition, Olympic College is creating a seamless pathway for students to



Business Briefs

begin their computer science education, earn an associate degree, and continue on to our Bachelor of Science in Computer Science program," said Staci Snyder, dean of Business & Information Technology. "Students can achieve their academic and career goals while staying right here in Kitsap County."

The associate degree complements Olympic College's existing Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, allowing students to potentially complete both degrees at the college. Students may also use the associate degree as a foundation for transferring to another four-

year institution.

Olympic College also offers computer science and computer information systems programs that include associate degrees and certificates in areas such as cybersecurity, technical support and web design.

The college said the expanded offerings are intended to provide students with flexible ways to earn credentials while helping develop a pipeline of technology workers for Kitsap County employers.

"This new program reflects Olympic College's commitment to preparing students for high-demand careers while strengthening



our local workforce," Olympic College President Chantae Recasner said. "It creates more opportunities for students to achieve their goals while supporting the continued growth and success of our community."

The addition comes as employers across industries increasingly rely on workers with skills in software, computer systems, cybersecurity and

other technology-related fields. College officials said keeping more students in Kitsap County for their education could also help local employers recruit workers for higher-wage technology positions.

Enrollment for the fall 2026 program is open. More information about the computer science program is available through the Olympic College website.

Blue Oasis Massage relocating to Silverdale, expanding services and team

Blue Oasis Massage is relocating to Silverdale in September, a move owner Kelsi Anderson says will allow the business to expand its staff and services while maintaining its focus on personalized care.

The massage therapy business will open at its new location Sept. 24 at 4550 NW

Newberry Hill Road, Suite 102. Blue Oasis will share the ground-floor space with Isella Aesthetics near the intersection of Newberry Hill and Provost roads.

"Blue Oasis Massage is entering an exciting new chapter," Anderson said. "The move to Silverdale gives me the opportunity not only to better serve my clients, but to thoughtfully expand the business while maintaining the personalized, high-quality care that has always been at the heart of Blue Oasis."

The relocation comes as Anderson prepares to grow Blue Oasis beyond her individual massage practice. The business plans to add another licensed massage

therapist within the next few months.

"What began as my individual massage practice is evolving into something much larger,"

Anderson said. "This next chapter for Blue Oasis Massage is about creating greater access to quality therapeutic massage, expanding the services we can provide, and building a team that shares the same commitment to exceptional client care."

Blue Oasis is also expanding its services. Beginning in October, the business plans to offer lymphatic drainage massage, with 60-minute sessions priced at \$100 and 90-minute sessions at \$150.

Its existing services includes Swedish, deep tissue, hot stone, prenatal and cupping massage, along with intraoral/TMJ massage and chair massage. The business said prices for

most traditional massage services will remain unchanged, although some other services have received slight price adjustments.

Blue Oasis is also adding a waitlist that will notify clients by email when appointment openings become available.

Operating hours will change beginning Oct. 6, with another schedule adjustment planned for Jan. 1, 2027.

Anderson said the expansion has developed in response to the business's clients and growing demand.

"I'm very proud of how organically Blue Oasis Massage has grown," Anderson said. "Each change – from the new Silverdale location to expanded services and plans to grow the team – has come from listening to my clients and recognizing where there is a greater need. I'm excited to see what this next chapter becomes." ■





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Senior Wellness

The Start-Up Next Door

Senior Living Communities Can Rewrite the Entrepreneur Playbook

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

The image of a startup founder is slowly changing. For decades, the popular culture painted entrepreneurship as a game exclusively for twenty-somethings working out of silicon-infused garages, but no longer. There can be a new wave of innovation, and it can emerge from an unexpected place: senior living communities.

When older adults combine their lifelong experience with entrepreneurial spirit, they create unique businesses that boost mental health, combat isolation, and add massive value to the local economy.

Launching a business later in life does not require a tech background or an eighty-hour work week. Instead, successful micro-businesses inside senior communities lean heavily on existing talents, storytelling, and human connection. Look closely at viable business models. Look at their operational needs and psychological benefits. We can see how senior entrepreneurship can transform retirement.

Tapping Into Lifelong Craftsmanship

Human beings have an innate desire to create. Retirement often provides uninterrupted time required to master a craft. Senior living communities are packed with former carpenters, quilters, knitters, painters, and chefs. Transforming these hobbies into micro-enterprises can provide residents with a profound sense of purpose.

Artisan goods possess a human touch that mass-produced items cannot replicate. Residents can band together to form creative collectives, producing custom quilts, hand-carved wooden toys, or delicate pottery.

These items can be sold at community bazaars, local farmer's markets, or through

digital storefronts managed by tech-savvy volunteers.

Food-based businesses also thrive in this environment. Many seniors possess legendary family recipes for baked goods, preserves, and spice blends. Operating under local cottage food laws or Washington laws, seniors can launch small-batch food brands. This keeps them physically active and allows them to share their cultural heritage through flavor.

Preserving Legacies in a Digital World

Another powerful avenue for senior entrepreneurship involves digital archiving and legacy preservation. Older adults possess a deep reverence for history because they have lived through it. They are uniquely qualified to help younger generations preserve their family narratives.

One highly successful business model is an oral history recording service. Residents can interview external clients or peers, capturing audio and video recordings of their life stories.

These recordings are then edited into digital keepsakes for families who want to preserve their grandparents' voices and memories forever.

The Power of Senior Consultancies

The single greatest asset within any senior living community is the sheer volume of collective brainpower. Within a single building, you might find retired corporate lawyers, public school teachers, accountants, nurses, and engineers.

Letting this knowledge sit idle is a massive loss for society.

Senior-led consulting groups allow residents to stay intellectually engaged on their own terms. Retired executives can form advisory panels for local small businesses or young entrepreneurs who cannot afford expensive agency fees.

Education is another natural fit. Seniors can offer remote language tutoring or conversation practice for university students learning a second language. They can also provide life-skills coaching, helping young adults learn practical skills like personal budgeting, professional writing, or basic home economics.

Overcoming Logistical Hurdles

While the talent inside senior communities is undeniable, launching a business requires a supportive ecosystem. Physical and cognitive limitations mean that operations must look a bit different than a traditional startup.

Partnership with community activity directors is essential. Staff can help clear regulatory hurdles, secure dedicated workspaces, and organize storage for raw materials. To ensure sustainability, businesses should feature flexible, modular tasks. If a resident has an off day due to health reasons, another resident should be able to step in easily, or the production schedule should allow for natural pauses.

More Than Money: The Real Return on Investment

While generating a modest income is exciting, the true value of senior entrepreneurship is measured in wellness. Studies consistently show that purposeful activity and social connection dramatically lower the risk of cognitive decline and depression in older adults.

Entrepreneurship gives residents a reason to wake up eager every morning. It forces them to problem-solve, collaborate, and interact with the outside world. It shifts the public view of senior living from a place of passive care to a vibrant hub of economic and intellectual activity.

When we empower seniors to become founders, everyone wins. ■



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Bloedel Reserve

Where Beauty Becomes a Way of Connecting

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

At Bloedel Reserve, visitors move through forests, gardens, ponds and moss-covered paths with little indication of the work required to make the landscape feel so effortless. Behind the scenes, horticulturists tend plants, staff manage technology and admissions, green waste becomes compost, donors help fund the operation and longtime employees carry decades of knowledge about the land.

For Evan Meyer, president and CEO of Bloedel Reserve, all of that work serves a larger purpose.

Bloedel is not simply a beautiful place to spend an afternoon. It is a living experiment in how a garden can help define a region's identity, support community well-being and influence how

people relate to the natural world.

"We're stewards of this incredible space," Meyer said. "To be good stewards, we have to understand what came before us and try to predict what's going to come after us, and position the organization and the gardens to be increasingly relevant in people's lives."

A garden that can only exist here

In an era of chain stores and increasingly similar communities, Meyer sees Bloedel as an antidote to sameness.

"Regional identity is super important, and places like Bloedel are the keepers of that," he said. "What we have here, you could not duplicate anywhere else in the world."

He points to the predictability of national

retail as a contrast.

"You could go to a Target in Silverdale or a Target in Chicago, and they're going to be basically the same thing," he said. "But this can only be done here."

That uniqueness goes beyond scenery. Meyer believes a strong connection to the local environment can help people better understand their role in addressing larger environmental challenges.

"We're living through a time of major environmental issues," he said. "The more that people are engaged with their local environment and understand what they can do to improve environmental outcomes in the future, I think is really important. We take a very soft approach. If someone comes here, visits, and leaves feeling a little moved – 'That was so beautiful, I want to learn a little bit more' – then we've done our job really well."

A private dream becomes a public treasure

Bloedel Reserve began as the private estate of Prentice and Virginia Bloedel. After selling his shares in the Bloedel Timber Company, Prentice Bloedel devoted his retirement to creating what he hoped would become one of the great gardens of America.

The couple spent more than 30 years shaping the property before it opened to the public in 1988 as an independent entity. Their vision incorporated influences from around the world while remaining deeply rooted in the Pacific Northwest.

"What makes this garden so special is that their taste and aesthetic was very unique," he said. "It was really grounded in an experience of coming from the timber industry – he was a science teacher – and they wanted to create something that felt like a really refined, Northwest-influenced aesthetic."

That vision remains evident throughout the Reserve, from forests dominated by western hemlock, Douglas fir and bigleaf maple to the Japanese garden, ponds and the famous moss garden.

"This is much more of a conversation with what's already here," Meyer said of the design. "It's partially a beautiful ornamental garden, partially a forest preserve. We get to play around at the intersection between conservation, land management and fine horticulture, which is a really unique blend."

The work visitors don't see

The seamless experience at Bloedel is intentional.

"One of my goals is that all the work we do in maintaining the landscape and operating admissions and all those things feels incredibly seamless for the guest," Meyer said. "We have to work really hard so that you can get here and just sink into the beauty and the experience."

That work requires expertise, technology, careful land management and a significant amount of community support.

Several Bloedel employees have been with the organization since the 1980s, providing a long-term perspective on the property and its changes.

Sustainability is another important part of that behind-the-scenes work. Bloedel's composting program turns green waste generated on the property back into a

resource for the landscape.

"The plants are really thriving because of this behind-the-scenes program of carefully creating compost out of our green waste," Meyer said. "As that program has come online with a new compost facility, it's allowed us to move in a much more natural direction and use way less pesticide and chemical fertilizers. We've drastically cut down on all of that, which is great for environmental purposes."

And, like any modern organization, Bloedel also depends on technology to keep the business operating.

"Running the garden and the business itself, like anything these days, it's a lot of technology – databases, point-of-sale systems," he said.

The Reserve also depends heavily on philanthropy. As a 501(c)(3), admissions revenue alone does not cover the cost of maintaining 140 acres of intensively managed landscape.

"A substantial portion of our funding is coming from philanthropy," Meyer said. "We would not be flourishing the way we are without a ton of community support and donors. I'm so grateful to the philanthropic spirit of this region that identifies the uniqueness and quality of Bloedel Reserve and makes sure it flourishes for now and for generations to come."

More than a destination

Bloedel is also an economic asset for the region.

"It's one of the premier tourist destinations on Bainbridge," Meyer said. "Having a world-class public garden in Kitsap County is a great draw for tourism and all the economic activity associated with that. It also helps spread tourists out



The historic Bloedel residence sits among the trees at Bloedel Reserve.
Photo Courtesy of Abby Wyatt Images

and get some off just Winslow."

But its role in the community extends beyond tourism.

"In the local community, we're offering many different ways to connect," he said. "There are events throughout the year that are very family-oriented, with food and music and art. As a place to spend time, connect with others and meet new people, it's really important."

Classes in horticulture, mushroom identification and plein-air painting give visitors another reason to engage with the property – not simply as spectators, but as participants.

"If you want to learn about nature and be in a beautiful space to do it, Bloedel is a great venue for that," Meyer said.

That emphasis on connection has increasingly expanded into the relationship between nature and health.



Photo Courtesy of Martina Machackova

Feature



1



2



3



1 Gardens, pools and streams create tranquil spaces throughout Bloedel Reserve. *Photo Courtesy of Abby Wyatt Images* 2 Bloedel Reserve offers visitors a chance to experience the beauty of the Pacific Northwest throughout the year. *Photo Courtesy of Keith Brofsky* 3 & 4 Rhododendrons add color to the trails as spring arrives at Bloedel Reserve. *Photos Courtesy of Abby Wyatt Images* 5 The Bloedel residence peeks through the trees, blending into the surrounding landscape. *Photo Courtesy of Martina Machackova*

Nature as a form of well-being

Over the past decade, Bloedel has explored how time spent in nature can support health and well-being, particularly mental health.

One of the Reserve's flagship programs, Strolls for Well-Being, uses self-guided walks and group check-ins to encourage participants to slow down and pay attention to their surroundings.

"It's really about tuning in to yourself through the act of being in nature," he said. "It comes from a lot of different traditions, like the Japanese forest bathing tradition, but we've honed it specifically for our setting here. I think it's a really innovative

program."

Bloedel also hosts grief groups, providing a setting for people processing the loss of loved ones.

"Those have been a really important offering to the community," Meyer said. "They help people process the loss of a loved one."

The Reserve is continuing to explore how nature-based programs can meet specific community needs. This fall, it will launch a version of Strolls for Well-Being designed specifically for new mothers. The program filled quickly.

Protecting the experience

Growth brings its own challenge. Bloedel wants to welcome

more people, but too many visitors could undermine the quiet and solitude that make the Reserve special.

"Part of the DNA and the beauty of the experience here is the quiet, the tranquility, the opportunity to have solace in nature," Meyer said. "But we also rely on visitors and ticket sales. There's an inherent tension: as more people come, how do you preserve that experience and not have it feel crowded?"

The answer is careful management rather than unlimited growth.

"We're really trying to navigate carefully – having open access while preserving that each individual experience is incredible," he said. "We want to welcome as many people as we

can sustainably on the site, but make sure every single person who comes has a wonderful experience."

Thinking beyond the next season

Perhaps nowhere is Bloedel's philosophy more apparent than in the way its staff think about time.

A garden does not operate on the same timeline as a typical business. A tree planted today may not reach maturity for decades. Decisions made now can shape what visitors experience generations from now.

"Being in the garden world kind of changes your sense of time," Meyer said. "When you plant a tree, you're thinking:



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in 100 years, will this be in the right place? There's something really rewarding about having a job that puts you in this longer time range, thinking in terms of generations and decades."

That long view is also shaping Meyer's goals for Bloedel over the next 10 to 20 years.

The objective is not simply to increase attendance or add programs. It is to influence how people think about nature.

"We really want the unique vision here to influence the way people think about their relationship to the natural world," he said. "We want everything – the gardens, the beauty of the trails, the programs and events – to add to the collective understanding and appreciation for nature."

The strategy, Meyer said, is not to lecture people about what they should value. It is to invite them to experience something

beautiful and let that experience create curiosity.

"We don't approach conversations from a place of, 'Oh my God, this is so bad,' or 'You're doing this wrong,'" he said. "It's more like, look at this beautiful thing. Welcome. Would you like to get to know more? Would you like to participate? We really focus on accessibility and reaching out to different communities across our region."

That may ultimately be Bloedel's most powerful role – not simply preserving a remarkable landscape, but using it to help people form a deeper relationship with the place they call home.

"I think beauty is the key that can unlock people's hearts," Meyer said. "That's really what we try to do here – get people to open their hearts and their minds to beauty, and from that, a lot of other things will flow." ■



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Human Resources

Why Every Small Business Is an HR Company Before It Becomes a Growth Company

By Julie Piazza | SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights

Ask a room full of entrepreneurs what makes their business successful, and you'll hear familiar answers: a unique product, exceptional service, innovative technology, or strong customer relationships. Those factors matter. But there's another reality many founders discover as they grow: every small business is an HR company before it becomes a growth company.

The ability to attract, develop, and retain the right people often determines whether a business scales successfully or stalls under the weight of its own growth.

Many owners focus heavily on sales, operations, and product development during the startup phase. But when growth accelerates, people challenges emerge fast. A business that doubles its revenue usually needs more employees, stronger management practices, clearer communication, and better-defined expectations. Without those foundations, growth creates problems just as quickly as it creates opportunities.

One of the most overlooked costs is the hidden people cost of rapid growth. When organizations expand too fast, employees

take on more without adequate support, training, or resources. Top performers get stretched thin. New hires lack proper onboarding. Managers suddenly lead teams with no leadership training. The result: burnout, inconsistent customer experience, and turnover. These costs rarely show up on the P&L until the damage is already done.

Culture forms earlier than most founders realize, too. It isn't defined by a mission statement on the wall, it's created by the behaviors founders reward, tolerate, and model every day. Hire in a rush, overlook performance issues, or make inconsistent decisions, and those habits become the culture. The first five or ten employees have an outsized influence on how everyone after them works and communicates. Founder hiring habits become either a competitive advantage or a long-term obstacle.

So what do you actually do about it? Building people infrastructure doesn't

require a big budget or an HR department. It starts with a handful of concrete moves you can make before you're "big enough" to need them:

- Write down your first five hires' onboarding, informally if that's what gets it done. A one-page document covering their first week's tasks, who they'll meet, and what success looks like at 30/60/90 days prevents new hires from learning your culture by accident.
- Give every manager one piece of leadership training before they manage anyone. Even a single session on giving feedback and setting expectations beats throwing someone into management untrained.
- Set a hiring bar and write it down before you're desperate to fill a seat. Rushed hires under pressure are where inconsistent culture usually starts. A simple list of must-haves and deal-breakers, decided calmly in advance, protects you from yourself later.
- Build a feedback rhythm, not a feedback event. A short, regular check-in, even 15 minutes every other week, does more for retention than an annual review ever will.
- Decide now how you'll handle a performance problem. Most founders' first instinct is to avoid the conversation. Knowing your process ahead of time: document, coach, and follow up makes it far more likely you'll actually act instead of tolerating it until it becomes culture.

None of these require outside expertise to start. They require deciding, early, that people practices are a business strategy not an administrative task to get to later.

For small businesses across Kitsap County and beyond, the message is clear: before you become a growth company, you must become a people company. The entrepreneurs who recognize this early and treat talent as a strategic asset rather than an afterthought, will be the ones best positioned to build organizations that thrive for years to come.

Julie Piazza is a workplace culture and leadership strategist who writes about HR trends, employee experience, and people-first business practices for small businesses and growing organizations. ■



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