KITSAP
November 2026

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A stronger community is good business

Forward THINKING

Every successful business depends on something it doesn't own: a healthy community.

We depend on customers who can support local businesses, employees who can afford to live here and families who see a future in Kitsap County. We depend on good schools, safe neighborhoods and the quality of life that makes people want to put down roots.

Much of the work that supports those things happens outside the business community, through nonprofit organizations operating with limited resources and considerable demands.



As the holiday giving season approaches, I think it's worth asking: If our businesses benefit from strong communities, what responsibility do we have to help build them?

Across Kitsap County, nonprofits provide food, housing assistance, youth programs, health services and opportunities in the arts and education. Their work often happens quietly, one person or family at a time.

But its impact reaches far beyond those directly served.

Consider the challenges facing local employers. Housing costs can make it difficult to attract and retain workers. Unreliable child care can keep parents from maintaining steady employment. Financial hardship leaves families with less to spend at local businesses.

These aren't simply social concerns. They're business concerns, too.

When a nonprofit helps a family find stability, that family is better positioned to participate in community life and the local economy. When a young person finds a mentor, we may be helping develop a future employee, entrepreneur or community leader.

The results may never appear on a company's balance sheet, but they help create the conditions in which businesses can succeed.

That's why I believe supporting nonprofits should be viewed as more than an annual charitable obligation. It's an investment in the long-term health of the place where we do business.

That doesn't mean generosity needs a financial justification. Helping people because they need help is reason enough.

But understanding how closely our fortunes are connected can change the way we approach giving.

Over more than three decades working with businesses and community organizations, I've learned that strong communities aren't built by any one group acting alone. They're built through relationships.

Business owners, nonprofit leaders, educators and volunteers bring different strengths to the table. Together, they can accomplish things none could achieve independently.

And not every contribution has to be financial.

I know small business owners are managing payroll, rising expenses and the daily pressure of keeping their doors open. For some, another donation simply isn't possible.

But a marketing professional might help a nonprofit tell its story. An accountant might offer budgeting advice. A business owner might mentor a student, serve on a board or introduce an organization to someone with the expertise it needs.

Sometimes the most valuable contribution isn't a check. It's a connection.

Sometimes it's sharing knowledge earned through years of running a business.

The key is to ask what would actually help, rather than assuming we already know.

There's also a difference between seasonal generosity and sustained commitment.

November and December bring food drives, fundraising campaigns and opportunities to give. Those efforts matter, and I hope they continue.

But families need assistance in February. Students need mentors in April. Community organizations need volunteers in July.

The challenges nonprofits address don't follow the holiday calendar.

A modest, ongoing relationship can be more useful than a single burst of attention. That might mean supporting one organization throughout the year, encouraging employee volunteerism or donating professional services when they're needed.

At Ward Media, we see how much Kitsap County depends on people willing to invest in something larger than themselves. Through Kitsap Business, Hey Neighbor! Kitsap and West Sound News, we have opportunities to tell those stories and connect readers with organizations making a difference.

We also recognize that our own success depends on the strength of the communities we serve. We should be willing to ask of ourselves what we ask of other businesses.

As the year winds down, I'd encourage every business owner and leader reading this to make one new commitment.

Choose a local nonprofit whose mission matters to you, your employees or your customers. Reach out. Listen. Ask what it needs. Then identify something your business can realistically offer, whether that's money, expertise, time or connections.

And consider how that relationship might continue into 2027.

It doesn't need to be a grand gesture, and it doesn't need a press release.

We often measure business success in revenue, growth and profitability. Those measures matter. But I believe another question belongs alongside them:

Is the community around our business stronger because we're part of it?

When we invest in the people and organizations strengthening Kitsap County, we're helping create a place where families can thrive, businesses can grow and future generations can find opportunity.

A stronger community isn't just good for the people who live here. It's good business. ■

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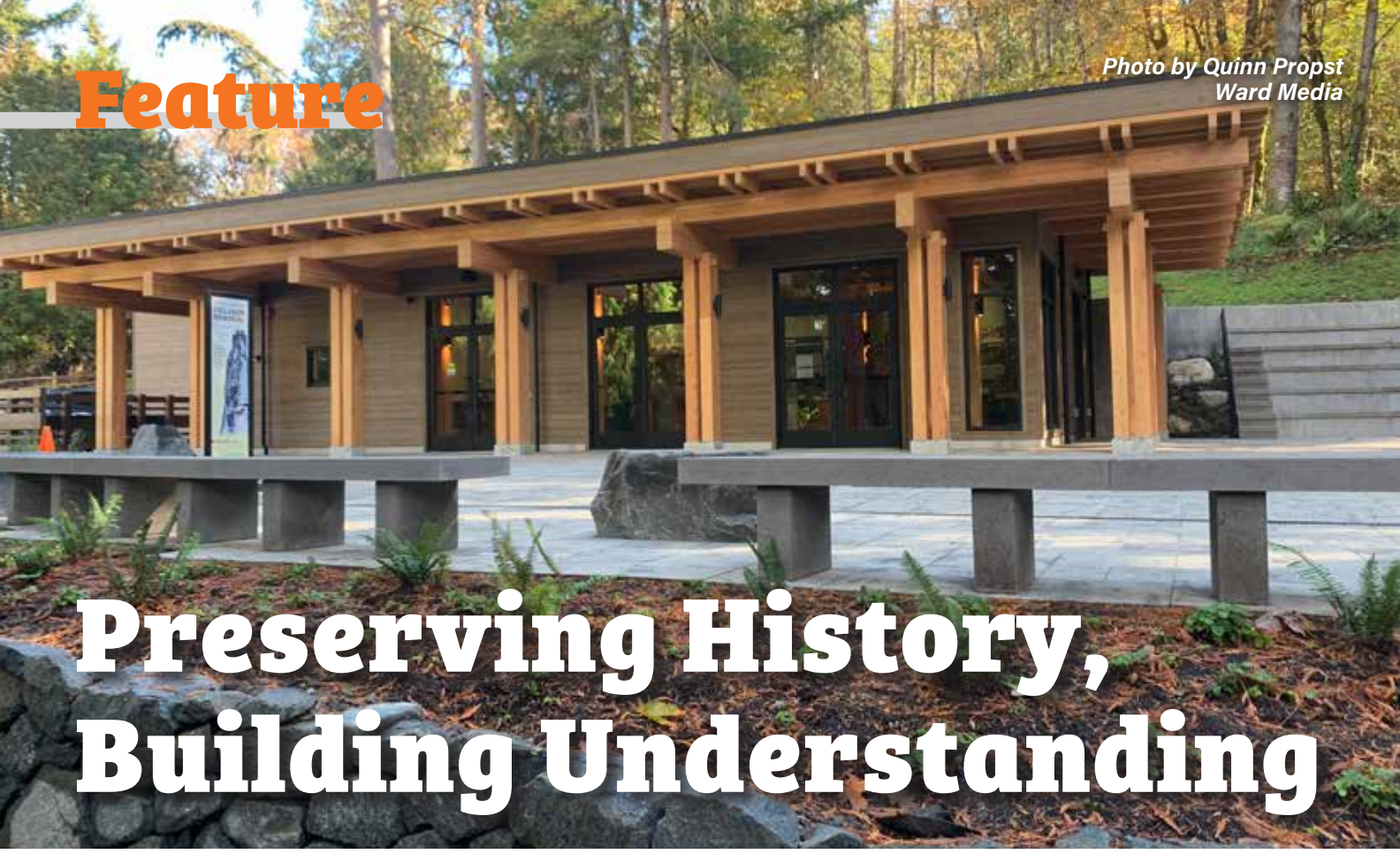


Photo by Quinn Propst
Ward Media

Preserving History, Building Understanding

New visitor center expands the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial's educational mission

The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial combines historical preservation with education, encouraging visitors to consider the lasting consequences of prejudice and injustice.

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

The opening of a new visitor center at the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial marks a milestone for an organization dedicated to preserving a painful chapter of American history and sharing its lessons with future generations.

Dedicated in October at Pritchard Park, the center provides a new space for visitors to explore the forced removal of Japanese Americans from Bainbridge Island during World War II. Its completion also represents more than two decades of community effort, fundraising and collaboration.

For the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial Association or BIJAEMA, which oversees the memorial's interpretation, educational programming and visitor center operations, the opening marks both the completion of a long-term project and the beginning of a new phase of work.

"The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial marks the historic site where 276 Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes on March 30, 1942, becoming the first community subjected to exclusion under Executive Order 9066 during WWII," said Ellen Sato, the association's executive director.

The memorial stands at the former Eagledale ferry dock, where the first group of Japanese Americans forcibly removed under the order departed for incarceration. Their lives and livelihoods were upended because of their Japanese ancestry.

The memorial honors those who were exiled, as well as the friends and neighbors who stood by them and welcomed them home. Its mission extends beyond preserving the historical record to creating a place for reflection, healing and education.

"Its mission is to provide a place of healing and learning, where the stories of the incarceration are preserved and the lessons about civil liberties, human rights, and the consequences of discrimination are shared with future generations," Sato said.

The memorial's guiding principle, *Nidoto Nai Yoni* – Let It Not Happen Again – captures the purpose behind that work.

For Sato, the history is personal. Both sides of her family were incarcerated during World War II. Her connection to the survivors and their stories inspired her involvement in the organization.

"My connection to this history is personal. Both sides of my family were incarcerated during





Japanese American exclusion survivors lead the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new visitor center at the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial. ***Photos Courtesy of Nancy Treder***

World War II, and my father was a survivor," Sato said. "I'm not a nonprofit professional by career, but I developed a connection with the Bainbridge Island survivors and enormous respect for their courage and willingness to share their painful history so openly. I wanted to help bring to completion a project they and so many others had worked toward for more than two decades."

Sato became executive director in 2022. She led the capital campaign and development of the visitor center, working with the association's board, community partners, donors, architects and contractors. Her responsibilities now include overseeing operations, educational programming and the organization's long-term sustainability.

A history rooted in community

On March 30, 1942, 276 Japanese Americans were removed from their Bainbridge Island homes and transported from the Eagledale ferry dock. They were the first community subjected to exclusion under Executive Order 9066, which authorized the forced removal of people of Japanese ancestry from designated areas during the war.

Two-thirds of those removed from Bainbridge Island were American citizens, Sato said. Their experiences illustrate the consequences of discrimination and the vulnerability of civil liberties during periods of fear and prejudice.

The memorial's outdoor interpretive features explain the significance of the historic site. Its Story Wall and Departure Deck offer visitors a more personal connection to the events.

"While the historical interpretation is relatively concise, the artistry and emotional impact of the Story Wall and Departure Deck convey the profound injustice of a government order that upended the lives of ordinary people solely because of their Japanese ancestry," Sato said.

The memorial also recognizes island residents who maintained relationships with Japanese American neighbors during their incarceration and welcomed them home. Their actions provide another dimension to the history, demonstrating the importance of compassion and solidarity during a period of injustice.

The new visitor center expands how the association can share these stories. Previously, visitors relied primarily on the outdoor memorial and guided tours. The center provides space for exhibits and historical artifacts, including materials that have not been readily accessible to the public.

"Our guided educational tours explore the unique stories of the Bainbridge Island community in greater depth," Sato said. "Now, with the opening of the Visitor Center, we can expand that educational experience through exhibits, historical artifacts, and future interactive digital workstations."

The indoor facility also allows visitors to engage with the material in greater comfort throughout the year.

"And frankly, it's a lot easier to learn when you're not standing outside in the rain and cold!" Sato said.

Education beyond remembrance

The association's educational mission is to help visitors understand not only what happened in 1942, but also how

❶ *Bainbridge Island Mayor Clarence Moriwaki speaks at the visitor center dedication ceremony.* ❷ *Ellen Sato, executive director of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial Association, addresses attendees during the visitor center dedication ceremony.* ❸ *National Park Service Superintendent Charles Beall speaks during the dedication ceremony for the new visitor center.* ***Photos Courtesy of Nancy Treder***



fear, prejudice and failures to protect civil liberties can lead to injustice.

"Education is at the heart of our mission," Sato said. "The Memorial was envisioned not only as a place of remembrance and healing, but also as a place of learning, where the lessons of the Japanese American incarceration can be shared with future generations."

The visitor center gives the organization more opportunities to engage students, community groups, families and businesses in those conversations. Future interactive exhibits and expanded access to historical materials will help deepen the experience and provide additional resources for educators.

The association also hopes to extend its reach beyond Bainbridge Island and the Pacific Northwest.

"Our ambition is for the Exclusion Memorial to become an increasingly valuable educational resource, not just for Bainbridge Island and the Pacific Northwest, but for visitors, educators, and institutions across the country and around the world," Sato said. "The history we preserve is uniquely Bainbridge Island's, but its lessons are universal."

Achieving that ambition will require the association to balance its educational goals with the practical responsibilities of operating a public facility.

The work behind the mission

The memorial operates through a partnership among organizations with distinct responsibilities. The Bainbridge Island Metro Park & Recreation District owns and maintains the grounds and built features. After the association funds and completes each phase of development, ownership and stewardship of those capital improvements transfer to the district.

The association oversees interpretation, educational programming, fundraising, day-to-day maintenance of its interpretive features and visitor center operations. The National Park Service provides additional interpretive and maintenance support through a cooperative management agreement with the Park District.

The arrangement brings together public agencies, nonprofit leadership and community participation to preserve the site and make its history accessible.

With the visitor center now open, however, the association faces greater operational demands.

"The opening of the Visitor Center represents a major transition for our organization," Sato said. "We are moving from a volunteer-supported outdoor memorial to operating a public facility with sophisticated exhibits, historical artifacts on loan, audiovisual systems, and building systems that require professional oversight. Volunteers remain essential, but the responsibilities and costs of operating the Memorial have grown considerably."

Maintaining the facility, caring for exhibits, managing building systems and delivering educational programs will require dependable funding, staff and volunteer support.



"Our greatest challenge going forward is ensuring the financial and organizational sustainability of everything we've built," Sato said. "Completing the Visitor Center was a tremendous achievement, but keeping it open, maintaining its exhibits, and delivering meaningful educational programs for future generations requires ongoing funding, capable staff, dedicated volunteers, and strong partnerships."

Funding for the visitor center came in roughly equal parts from government grants, private foundations and individual donations, Sato said. More than two decades of grassroots effort and community generosity helped bring the project to completion.

"The Memorial is a remarkable example of what can be accomplished through community partnerships and shared commitment," she said.

The association's partnerships with the National Park Service, the Park District,

❶ Lily Kodama, a Japanese American exclusion survivor and member of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial Association board, attends the visitor center dedication ceremony ❷ & ❸ Attendees listen to speakers during the dedication ceremony for the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial's new visitor center. ***Photos Courtesy of Nancy Treder***









Photos by Quinn Propst / Ward Media

The memorial's Story Wall and Departure Deck help visitors connect with the experiences of Japanese Americans who were forcibly removed from Bainbridge Island in 1942.



The new visitor center provides additional space for exhibits and historical materials, strengthening the memorial's role as an educational resource for students, families and community groups.





the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, the Bainbridge Island History Museum and other organizations provide expertise and resources. Volunteers welcome visitors, lead tours and help share the history.

Those relationships will remain important as the association shifts its focus from completing construction to sustaining the facility and expanding its educational offerings.

Sustaining the next chapter

The association's immediate priority is establishing sustainable operations, building a strong team of staff and volunteers, and making the most of the new facility.

Additional work remains, including developing interactive digital exhibits and completing other elements of the memorial grounds. The organization also wants to make more of its historical materials and personal stories accessible to the public.

Local residents and businesses can help support those efforts by visiting the memorial, volunteering, sharing its history and making financial contributions. Donations help fund visitor center operations, expand educational offerings and complete the remaining elements of the memorial.

Sato hopes businesses will recognize the organization as a community resource with a lasting role in education and civic life.

"Above all, we hope local residents and businesses will embrace the Memorial as a community resource – one that preserves an important chapter of our shared history and helps ensure its lessons are never forgotten," she said.

For Sato, the memorial's significance lies in both the injustice experienced by Japanese Americans and the responsibility communities have to protect one another's rights.

"The history we preserve happened right here in our community, to ordinary people – two-thirds of whom were American citizens – whose lives were upended simply because of their Japanese ancestry," she said. "It's a reminder that the loss of civil liberties and the consequences of prejudice are not abstract concepts or things that happen only somewhere else."

The story also offers a lesson in human connection.

"But the Bainbridge Island story is also one of courage, compassion, resilience, and the neighbors who stood by their Japanese American friends when so many others did not," Sato said. "We hope visitors leave with a deeper understanding of both the injustice and the humanity of this history, and a recognition that each of us has a responsibility to stand up for the rights and dignity of others."

The new visitor center gives the association greater capacity to preserve those experiences and share them with a wider audience. Its long-term success will depend on the community partnerships and sustained support that brought the project to completion.

"Our guiding principle is *Nidoto Nai Yoni* – Let It Not Happen Again," Sato said. "That's ultimately what we hope every visitor takes away." ■

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Money is a muscle: Build financial strength before wealth arrives

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

Money is a muscle.

Learning new skills is hard, but practice makes you better. Driving is a great example of this. When my oldest turned 15 he got his permit and the thing about learning to drive (a lot like life) is that there are no training wheels. It's 5 p.m. in Silverdale... gentlemen start your engines! He did a lot of turns successfully; blinker, look over the shoulder, change lanes while keeping speed,... then we run a red light, ... cut off a person in the roundabout,... and miss our driveway. "It's okay, it's okay" I say, "Just keep going and look for a place to pull over to the right side, back into a driveway, and then pull out forward onto the road." He says, "Okay." And we keep driving. So I say it again real nice like, because nerves don't mix well when you're 15 years old and trying to control a 1.5 ton battering ram going 40 miles an hour down Chico Way. He responds "Dad I'm going to do a U-turn instead and I'm just looking for a good spot." And so – two miles later – he picks the narrowest part of the road and we do a three point turn in the middle of the street. The good news... still alive! And now he's a great driver, mainly because he had a lot of practice.



There is something significant happening right now that will require a lot of practice. We are at the start of the largest wealth transfer in history. According to research firm Cerulli Associates there is an estimated $14 trillion of wealth that will be given to Gen X over the next 10 years. And $46 trillion that will be given to Millennials over the next 25 years. A trillion is an incomprehensible amount of money. If you have one trillion dollars you could spend $92 million a day for 30 years straight.

This inheritance is inevitable and makes "Sudden Wealth" a very real thing. And sudden wealth comes with very sudden challenges. It's a brand new skill set. Imagine driving an automatic car your whole life and suddenly your parents pass away and leave you a $4.4 million dollar Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe... which is a manual stick shift. Now you are 15 years old all over again and have to learn how to drive. If you practice today how to drive a stick, then you are prepared in advance. Even if you don't have the Shelby yet.

Our natural drive, when it comes to money, is to look inward. In the most quantum physics type of way, the emotions we have about money become a living breathing thing. We either push money out by spending it to make our lives easier, or we pull money in by clinging to it out of the fear of losing it. It all distills to worry about not being comfortable or fear of losing security. (Side note: This is why it's so important to work with a wealth advisor to make sure you have a financial exercise plan, and why it's so important to upgrade your advisor as you get financially stronger.)

There is a secret to building money muscle. And weirdly, the antidote to worry and fear is to give money away.

The act of giving can often feel unnatural and that's exactly the point. It's natural to cling to money, but the actual action of giving money away (from each paycheck!) proves to yourself that you are in control of your money instead of your money being in control of you. You are actively repeating that you have enough to give some away. It's doesn't have to be a lot, but it has to be consistent. You are actually rewiring how you feel and act regarding money. Then when you get an inheritance, a sudden wealth event, you get to hold on with strong, open hands and determine how to use this as a tool for your future.

During this holiday season is a perfect time to start. Choose a charity or non-profit with a cause you like and set up an automatic monthly gift. Flex. Start asking what version of you that your future self wants to be. Set the goal that changes you, and the numbers will follow. Statistically the average inheritance is gone in three years. Why? Because money is a muscle. And often that muscle has not been exercised. So get strong for your future. ■

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Feature

Keeping Homeownership Within Reach in Kitsap County

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For many Kitsap County families, buying a home is becoming increasingly difficult. Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County is working to address that challenge with a 19-townhome development designed to keep homes affordable for generations, even after the original owners move on.

For CEO Annette Houchin, the project represents an opportunity to address one of the region's most persistent challenges: helping local families achieve stable homeownership as housing and living costs continue to rise.

Traditionally, when a Habitat homeowner moves, the home can return to the open market, where its price may put it beyond the reach of another income-qualified family. To help prevent that, Habitat's planned Bremerton-area development will use a ground-lease model intended to preserve affordability for as long as 99 years.

Under the arrangement, buyers will own their homes but lease the land from Habitat. When homeowners decide to move, they can receive some equity, but the homes must be sold to other income-qualified buyers.

"We really weren't helping the affordable housing" if homes eventually went back onto the open market, Houchin said. With the ground-lease model, "we figured that at least we'll be able to keep those units permanently affordable."

The development marks a significant undertaking for the Kitsap affiliate, which is preparing a $1 million capital campaign to help advance the project while continuing its existing homebuilding and homeownership programs.

Habitat has built more than 100 homes, Houchin said, and operates the local ReStore, which sells donated goods to support the organization's mission. The affiliate has also spent the past decade working on Harris Court, a 32-unit subdivision in Port Orchard, alongside smaller projects.

But the need for affordable housing continues to grow, and qualifying for homeownership has become increasingly difficult. Rising housing



Annette Houchin, CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County, leads the organization's efforts to expand affordable homeownership opportunities in the region. ***Photo by Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio***



A volunteer crew in front of a home they are helping to build.
Photo Courtesy of Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County

costs, along with higher prices for food and fuel, are squeezing household budgets.

Houchin said Habitat is seeing fewer prospective buyers who can qualify for its homes.

The organization typically serves households earning between about 40% and 80% of area median income. Even families near the upper end of that range can struggle to afford a mortgage. Under the financing arrangement Houchin described, buyers earning up to 65% of area median income can access a 4.5% interest rate, while those earning more must pay market rates.

"That market is so slim," Houchin said. "We're trying to figure out how do we market the new area median income that we need to get the right buyers into those homes."

The gap between housing assistance eligibility and market prices creates another challenge. Some households earn too much to qualify for certain affordable housing programs but still cannot afford homes at prevailing prices.

Houchin said she sees people "fall through the cracks," including those earning slightly more than 80% of area median income who remain unable to purchase a home.

For many families, the obstacle begins well before they apply for a mortgage. Rent and everyday expenses can leave little money to save for a down payment, while rising land and construction costs make it more expensive for Habitat to build.

"I think the biggest barriers are paying rent and putting food on the table," Houchin said.

Houchin has watched those pressures intensify throughout nearly three decades of work with Habitat for Humanity. She began working for the organization in Ventura County, California, in 1997, later joined an affiliate in Terre Haute, Indiana, and eventually moved to Washington to lead Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County.

The region's housing challenges remind her of California in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

"The cost of land is rising, and the affordable units are just becoming harder and harder to find," she said. "We really need to be doing a lot more than what we're doing. But guess what? It costs money."

Building a path to ownership

Habitat's homeownership process begins online, where prospective applicants can watch informational videos and complete a brief form about their income, rental history and first-time homebuyer status. If their initial information suggests they may qualify, Habitat directs them to obtain a mortgage preapproval.

Applicants can work with a bank or HomeSight, a nonprofit that can connect buyers with down-payment assistance. After a prospective buyer receives preapproval, Habitat's board reviews the application and selects a family. A third-party lender handles lending approval and the final review of the buyer's finances.

Habitat stopped carrying its own mortgages in 2017. Houchin said managing the lending process internally had become time-consuming, and the affiliate was not an underwriting institution. Working with an outside lender gives the organization greater confidence that buyers can manage their mortgage payments.

Selected families also contribute "sweat equity," or volunteer hours connected to building their homes and supporting Habitat's work. The requirement has decreased over time, from 500 hours to 250 and now to 100.

"We're finding that both parents are working, or it's a single person, and life is just too much," Houchin said. "They just cannot meet those 250 sweat equity hours."

Families can complete most of their hours working on their own homes or helping with a neighbor's home. Friends and relatives may contribute a small portion of the required hours. Houchin said the reduced requirement has made participation more manageable while preserving an opportunity for buyers to contribute to the process.

The construction program has also evolved. Habitat once relied more heavily on volunteers to build homes, but many did not return after the pandemic shutdown. The affiliate now employs construction staff, including a site supervisor, a carpenter and a crew, who work alongside volunteers.

Paid staff handle more specialized work, while experienced volunteers help newcomers learn construction skills. That mentorship creates opportunities for volunteers to develop their abilities and take on more responsibility.

"If they stick with it, our unskilled volunteers become our skilled volunteers," Houchin said.

The ReStore provides another way for community members to support Habitat's work. The store sells donated goods, including building materials from contractors and other community members, generating revenue for the organization while keeping usable items out of landfills.

"We encourage contractors with leftover materials to donate them to the store," Houchin said. "The money that we get from the store helps the mission, which ultimately helps housing affordability."

Local banks, businesses and community partners also contribute through financing, donations and event support. Habitat's recent breakfast drew nearly 300 people, Houchin said. Community contributions have helped the organization hire staff at higher wages and bring skilled construction workers onto its team.

Lucy and Chloe, the office cats adopted by Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County staff in 2022, make their home in the organization's administrative office.



Homes designed for long-term stability

Habitat's approach extends beyond making a home affordable to purchase. The affiliate is building net-zero homes equipped with solar panels, energy-efficient appliances and systems designed to reduce utility costs. The homes are tightly sealed and use a system that brings fresh air inside.

Houchin said these features can help families manage household expenses while supporting healthier living conditions. Reducing moisture and mold problems can mean fewer illnesses and less time away from work to care for sick children.

Stable housing can also benefit children's education. Houchin said Habitat has seen children living in its homes continue their education beyond high school.

The effects extend to employers and the broader community. When families can afford to remain in Kitsap County, local businesses have a better chance of retaining workers. And when children live in healthier homes, parents may face



Volunteers help build a Habitat for Humanity home, contributing their time and skills to expand affordable homeownership opportunities in Kitsap County.

Photos Courtesy of Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County



Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County construction workers and volunteers work together to build affordable homes for local families.

fewer disruptions to their work schedules.

"Habitat is actually part of the solution and not the problem," Houchin said.

She added that long-term affordability can protect families from rent increases that might otherwise force them to move.

Rebuilding the organization

Habitat's current plans reflect years of work to strengthen the organization itself. When Houchin arrived, she said, the affiliate had one staff member and was in financial disarray. At one point, it had only one board member. It had gone several years without an audit and was struggling with limited resources.

Houchin worked to rebuild the organization and establish a stronger operational foundation.

"I don't want to say that I turned it around," she said. "With help, we turned it around."

Today, the affiliate has a full staff, a leadership team, an engaged board and clean annual audits. Houchin credits community support with helping Habitat reach that point and is particularly proud of its recent hires, including a person who first joined the organization as a volunteer and later became director of construction.

"I just sit back and it's like, 'Wow, I did that. I hired that person,'" she said.

Maintaining that organizational strength will be important as Habitat pursues its next phase of growth. The affiliate's priorities include completing the 19-townhome development, establishing the ground-lease agreements and sustaining an effective staff and board. Houchin hopes the project will serve as a starting point for additional developments rather than a one-time effort.

To expand its reach, Habitat is exploring partnerships that would allow it to take on more projects without managing every aspect of development itself.

Houchin said the organization is considering a possible partnership with a housing authority to help renters move toward homeownership, as well as collaborations with contractors and developers. Under one potential arrangement, a developer could build homes while Habitat identifies eligible buyers. Another possibility is a mixed-income development that combines affordable homes with market-rate units.

"There are a lot of things that I think that we can do that we don't have to do ourselves," Houchin said. "We can have help."

For now, the 19 townhomes represent a concrete step toward preserving affordable homeownership in Kitsap County. The project will require substantial fundraising, careful planning and continued community support, and Houchin recognizes that even a successful development will address only a small portion of the region's housing needs.

"The bad part of it is that's only 19 units," she said. "When the 19 units" are underway, "we should be building another 19 or 20."

That goal reflects the scale of the challenge facing Habitat and the families it serves. As housing costs continue to rise, Houchin said the organization remains committed to finding ways to help more people put down roots in Kitsap County.

"We are not going to give up," she said. ■

A message for the future homeowner of a Habitat for Humanity home.



Beyond the Sale: How Kitsap Nonprofits Build Stronger Communities



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

The real estate problem nonprofits don't put in their mission statement

In real estate, conversations often start with price, interest rates, and inventory. But for a handful of Kitsap County's largest nonprofits, real estate isn't overhead beside the mission, it is the mission. The county's Housing and Homelessness Division plans and funds the response to housing instability, but local nonprofits deliver nearly all of the shelter, housing, and support services inside that effort. A land trust's product is a ground lease. A housing nonprofit's product is a deed. A food bank's capacity is capped by square footage, not donations. Solving the real estate problem usually comes before the fundraising campaign gets credit for it, that's as true for a land trust holding a ground lease as it is for a food bank buying a building to survive its own growth.

Housing nonprofits: two different kinds of ownership

Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County has built 107 homes since 1992, partnering with local households who complete required education and must demonstrate the ability to carry an affordable mortgage. Each home is acquired as land or a lot, built out, and transferred into the family's name outright, full ownership, full equity, full responsibility (Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap County).

Housing Resources Bainbridge takes a different route through its community land trust. The nonprofit keeps the land, while qualified buyers purchase the home on top of it under a ground lease that caps the resale price. The buyer still builds equity; what's capped is how much that equity can run away from what the next household can afford (Housing Resources Bainbridge). One model transfers the whole asset. The other keeps part of it in trust, permanently, so affordability outlives any single sale.

Keeping neighbors housed without a sale



Not every housing problem starts with buying property. Kitsap Community Resources runs the Housing Solutions Center, where navigators assess a household's situation and connect them to shelter, rental or deposit assistance, and landlord referrals, a front door into the system rather than a transaction. Housing Resources Bainbridge does similar work from the other end, funding repairs and modifications that let older adults and people with disabilities stay in the homes they already own.

When outgrowing the building is the whole strategic plan

South Kitsap Helpline spent roughly four years trying to build new on its existing property before stormwater permitting made that prohibitively expensive. It bought instead, a former restaurant near Mitchell Avenue in Port Orchard, redirecting a federal appropriation originally earmarked for construction into the purchase, with a second appropriation funding renovations (Kitsap Daily News). The new site roughly triples a food bank the executive director describes as "about the size of a large walk-in closet."

The connection to housing isn't incidental. When groceries are covered, a household has more room in its budget for rent and utilities, food assistance isn't a substitute for affordable housing, but it's often part of what keeps someone from losing the home they have.

How Kitsap's business community can help

Real estate professionals, lenders, contractors, and business owners have practical ways in. Organize a volunteer team, sponsor a program, or offer professional skills matched to what an organization says it actually needs, ask before assuming. Listing prep is its own opportunity: Habitat's local ReStore accepts donated furniture, appliances, and building materials, with proceeds supporting its housing mission, so a client downsizing or renovating can donate instead of hauling to the dump. Property owners can also start a conversation about land donations or underused space, reviewed honestly for access, condition, and operating cost, so the gift doesn't become a burden on the organization it's meant to help.

As a managing broker, I see housing stability as both a community priority and a business one, Kitsap's future needs attainable homes for the people who power its economy. Real estate here is about more than what a property is worth. It's about what having a place to call home makes possible. ■

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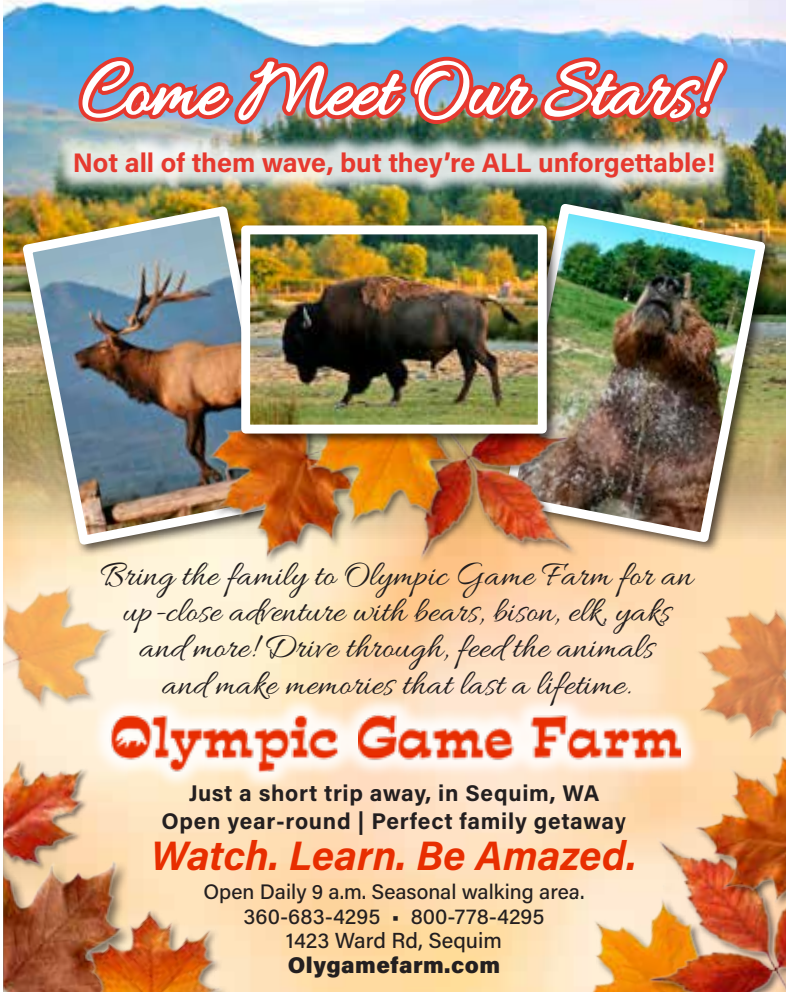
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Feature

More than legal help: KIAC builds pathways for immigrant families across Kitsap

From immigration services and emergency assistance to interpreter training and youth leadership, the organization follows community needs wherever they lead.

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

When a family turns to the Kitsap Immigration Assistance Center for help, the immediate concern may be an immigration case. But that family may also be struggling to pay rent, find a doctor, get to an appointment or help their children feel a sense of belonging.

Those challenges often overlap, and addressing them can require more than a single service. KIAC connects immigration legal assistance with practical resources, community partnerships and programs designed to help immigrant families build stability and opportunity.

"Everyone deserves to live with safety, opportunity, and dignity, regardless of where they were born," said Dr. Jessica Salvador, KIAC's executive director.

Founded in 2004 as a volunteer-led effort by community members, KIAC has grown over 22 years into an organization serving more than 2,000 people from over 70 countries, Salvador said. Its mission is to advance the well-being and power of immigrant communities through education, advocacy and social justice.

The organization's main office is in Bremerton, with a second site in Port Townsend. That location grew out of KIAC's immigration legal work, Salvador said, making services more accessible to people who otherwise would have to travel to Bremerton. Staff attorneys and trained legal volunteers, including accredited representatives, help clients navigate immigration matters.

Legal services remain central to the organization's work, but families may need support in other areas, too. KIAC helps people navigate health care, housing and food resources, and partners with other organizations to bring services closer to the community. Peninsula Community Health Services, for example, has brought mobile medical and dental services to KIAC's site.

"We're not only doing immigration legal services, but also supporting the family with everything else around that," Salvador said. "Whether it was advocacy work, supporting them with navigating resources, having access to low-cost medical care, and essentially everything around it."

For some families, that support reflects years of effort and uncertainty. Salvador recalled meeting a mother who came to KIAC with her son after being reunited with him following a decade apart. She still had other children who had not yet joined them. Within a year, Salvador said, the rest of her children had arrived.



Dr. Jessica Salvador, executive director of the Kitsap Immigration Assistance Center, leads an organization focused on supporting immigrant communities through education, advocacy and access to resources.

Photos Courtesy of Olya Blase







The Kitsap Immigration Assistance Center connects families with resources for housing, food, health care and other needs while helping them navigate complex immigration matters.

"It was very powerful to see how much impact" the organization's work could have, she said. "It was years in the making, but she finally got to see her children again."

Programs shaped by community needs

KIAC has expanded its programs in response to gaps identified by the people it serves. A youth leadership program launched in 2024, for example, grew out of families' desire for a place where teenagers could develop a stronger sense of identity and belonging.

Some young people were navigating different expectations at home and school while trying to understand where they fit, Salvador said. Families also expressed concern that their children might become disconnected from their culture or lose interest in learning their Indigenous languages.

The program gives young people opportunities to connect with peers, learn about their backgrounds and take pride in who they are. Creating a supportive community can help them see others who share their experiences and are proud of them, Salvador said.

Another initiative addresses a practical obstacle to employment and independence: transportation.

KIAC is partnering with Mujer al Volante, a King County nonprofit that teaches women to drive. The partner provides instruction, including theoretical and behind-the-wheel training, while KIAC helps host the program and offers resources such as food and assistance with permit and license costs.

Driving lessons and licensing can be expensive, Salvador said, and limited transportation can make it harder for people to reach work or pursue other opportunities. KIAC recently completed a program in Bremerton and launched another in Port Townsend.

The organization has also established the Language Justice Interpreters Collective to create paid work and career pathways for people with language skills.

Some clients speak Indigenous languages as their primary language and Spanish as a second language, Salvador said. Qualified interpreters are essential to ensuring those clients understand the services and information available to them.

The collective provides foundational training for interpreting in social services and connects participants with organizations seeking their help. Interpreters can work as independent contractors, creating an opportunity to develop their skills into a source of income.

"There's a lot of richness in our communities," Salvador said. "People already have this knowledge. They just need to be given the guidance or have the pathway opened up."

The program also recognizes skills that community members are often asked to provide without compensation. KIAC aims to help people build on their existing knowledge and, if they choose, develop a career in interpretation.

Personal experience, systemic change

For Salvador, the work is closely connected to her own life. She is the child of immigrants and a first-generation college graduate in the United States. She remembers her parents' pride when they became citizens and understands the sacrifices families make to create opportunities for the next generation.

Her professional path included several fields. After studying civil engineering, she worked in education and nonprofit community economic development before joining KIAC. Across those experiences, she said, she kept returning to the question of how systems could change to give people more equitable access to opportunity.

"What kept driving me was thinking about how we can change systems so that people have equitable access to opportunities," Salvador said, "rather than having to navigate barriers that were not really designed for certain folks to begin with."

KIAC appealed to her because it combines immigration legal services with support for the broader circumstances

affecting families. Salvador sees opportunities to strengthen existing programs, expand partnerships and create more avenues for community leadership and collective action.

That approach also reflects the challenges facing immigrant families throughout Kitsap County and the broader peninsula.



KIAC's programs include immigration legal services, monthly food distributions, youth leadership opportunities and training for interpreters seeking paid work.

Needs that overlap

Rising living costs, housing insecurity, limited access to health care and transportation barriers affect many of the families KIAC serves. Transit options vary across the region, Salvador said, making it especially difficult for people who live farther from services.

Housing assistance is one way the organization responds to immediate hardship. KIAC helps families facing emergencies, including people who cannot work after an accident, and partners with Kitsap Community Resources on housing vouchers.

Uncertainty surrounding immigration policies and enforcement has added another source of stress. KIAC has supported families whose loved ones have been detained or deported, including people who were not previously clients, Salvador said.

Fear can affect everyday decisions, she said, discouraging people from seeking medical care, reporting workplace concerns, enrolling children in programs or reporting domestic violence.

"It impacts everybody," Salvador said. "The profiling is so great that it doesn't matter who you are."

The organization is looking for ways to connect families with mental health support, but referrals can be difficult when someone lacks insurance that qualifies them for a particular service. KIAC is exploring potential models and funding to address that gap.

Demand for immigration legal services has also increased, Salvador said. Cases have become more complex and require more staff time, while filing fees can create a significant financial burden. KIAC established a legal solidarity fund to help individuals and families cover legal costs.

For some families, those expenses compete directly with basic necessities.

"They have to decide: Do I pay my rent or do I pay this document that, if I don't pay it, I could get deported?"

KIAC also addresses food insecurity through La Canasta Comunitaria, a monthly food distribution program. Salvador said the organization works to meet immediate needs while considering the broader conditions, including policy decisions, that contribute to them.

Contributions and opportunity

Immigrants are an important part of the region's workforce and business community, contributing to fields including caregiving, food services, agriculture and health care, Salvador said. Many arrive with professional experience, technical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge that may not be recognized by systems in the United States.

She pointed to Japanese and Filipino American families who helped build Bainbridge Island's agricultural economy as examples of the longstanding contributions immigrant communities have made to Kitsap County.

KIAC helps some clients navigate the practical requirements of starting and operating a business, including licensing and taxes. It promotes small-business classes through local partners and works with Kitsap Community Resources on tax-season support.

The organization is also exploring workshops and other assistance for small businesses, including help with bookkeeping, marketing and regulatory requirements.

For entrepreneurs, barriers can include limited access to capital, language access and difficulty understanding regulations. KIAC wants to make those pathways easier to navigate so people can use their skills and experience to build businesses, Salvador said.

"I would love to see more local employers recognize that talent, including professional experience gained in other



countries," she said, "and look for ways to remove barriers."

Supporting the whole organization

Providing legal assistance, emergency support, youth programming and workforce opportunities requires funding that can be difficult to secure. Grants are often restricted to particular programs, populations, activities or geographic areas, Salvador said, while the needs of the people KIAC serves rarely fit into separate categories.

"Someone who needs legal assistance may also be facing housing insecurity," she said. "They may be facing food insecurity or transportation barriers."

Immigration cases require specialized staff and substantial time, and increasing complexity has added to the pressure. Funding for a specific service may not cover its full cost, leaving the organization to seek flexible resources that can respond as needs change.

Salvador encourages donors to consider the organization as a whole, including the staff, relationships and operational capacity that make its services possible, rather than viewing each program in isolation.

Community members can support KIAC and similar organizations in other ways, too. Salvador encouraged people to stay informed about policy, contact elected representatives, participate in local discussions and contribute according to their means. Restaurants and other businesses may be able to provide in-kind donations for events.

KIAC is also accepting volunteers for its accompaniment program. Volunteers can accompany someone to an immigration-related appointment, wait nearby if they cannot enter and help the person feel less alone. They do not provide legal advice or speak on behalf of the client.

Salvador said KIAC is onboarding volunteers gradually to ensure the program remains manageable for staff and participants.

For her, the broader goal is to build a region where everyone who lives, works and raises a family has a chance to experience safety, stability, opportunity and belonging. Achieving that may require different kinds of support for different people.

Salvador offered a simple analogy for equity: If two people need to see clearly and one needs glasses, providing the glasses helps both reach the same point.

"Building a welcoming and thriving region is a shared responsibility," Salvador said. "When we invest in each other, our entire community is stronger." ■



From immigration legal assistance to youth leadership and interpreter training, KIAC develops programs in response to the needs of immigrant communities across the region.



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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.

A Big Contract Shouldn't Be a Kiss of Death

What listening to Kitsap's entrepreneurs, investors, lenders, and community leaders revealed about capital, and where we go from here.

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

Imagine landing the biggest contract in your company's history and worrying it could put you out of business.

That's the dilemma one Kitsap entrepreneur shared as part of Matchstick Lab's recent exploration of what the SBA calls "capital formation."

"If we get much bigger, we're going to need our own facility. And that equipment is expensive. At this point, a really big contract could almost be a kiss of death."

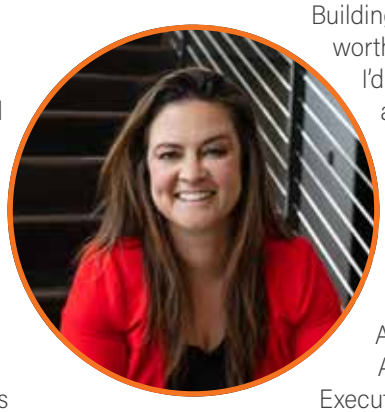
The lesson? Having an opportunity to grow and having the means to pursue it are two very different things.

It's Not Just About Finding More Money

Our new report, Connecting Capital Across Kitsap, found that 43% of surveyed entrepreneurs had experienced capital gaps that constrained growth. Perhaps more telling, 61% had avoided pursuing financing because the process was too complex.

But look closely and the needs vary enormously. A neighborhood restaurant may need help understanding its financing options. A growing construction company needs financials ready for a major loan. A manufacturer selling beyond Kitsap needs industry-specific expertise, while a technology startup needs investors who speak its language.





It sounds obvious, yet it's essential: capital needs to fit the way businesses want to grow, not the other way around.

So Where Do We Start?

Our report identifies five opportunities, two of which can start now.

The first is a business-friendly front door to help entrepreneurs find, prepare for, and navigate existing funding. Capital does little good if businesses can't find it, understand it, or access it.

The second is building Kitsap's local investor community. There are many ways to do this, of course. One worth considering? In September, nearly 50 people joined us at Vibe Coworks to learn how Local Investment Networks help communities invest in their own businesses. Our neighbors in Jefferson County have invested more than $13.8 million through the LION network.

Kitsap can do the same.

But lest we get ahead of ourselves, let's remember: none of this happens on its own.

Kitsap has good organizations doing good work. What we lack is dedicated capacity to connect entrepreneurs with capital and develop local investors alongside existing economic development efforts.

Building that capacity is an investment worth making. Interested in helping? I'd love to hear from you: alanna@matchsticklab.co.

Let's Get in a Room Together

On November 18, we'll carry this work into our third annual Firebrand Unconference and After Party.

Aina Abiodun, President and Executive Director of VertueLab and a three-time founder and CEO, will open the day before we turn the agenda over to Kitsap's entrepreneurs.

We'll bring investors, mentors, and financial leaders together to explore local investment, while our Listening Room gives civic leaders a chance to hear directly from founders.

It would be naive to think one report or event will transform Kitsap's economy. But I believe we have a real opportunity to build something meaningful if enough of us get involved.

With elections behind us, I hope returning and incoming leaders will recognize the opportunity to invest in the conditions – not just programs – that Kitsap's entrepreneurs need to succeed.

We've been listening. Now it's time to act on what we've learned.

Business owners, join us at Firebrand on November 18. Investors, civic leaders, and community champions, join us at the After Party, 5–7 p.m. matchsticklab.co/firebrand-unconference-2026/ ■



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Legal

Your Employee Runs an Errand. Whose Insurance is on the Line?

By Ashley Armstrong | Attorney/Owner, Armstrong Injury Law

Office printers have a remarkable ability to run out of paper at precisely the wrong moment. You've run out of paper, and you need to get a document out today. Your employee goes to buy more and, in his rush to get back, rear-ends someone, causing injuries to himself and to the other driver. Is your business responsible for your employee's damaged vehicle and medical bills? What about the other driver's losses? What if your employee can't work because of his injuries? Suddenly, picking up printer paper has become considerably more complicated than anyone anticipated.

Have you checked your coverage?

Planning ahead for unexpected challenges is an important part of running a business. If your business does not carry liability insurance with bodily injury, property damage, medical payments, and auto coverage, connect with one of our local insurance agents to review your options. The goal is to make sure your insurance covers the way your business actually operates.



Also, if you are regularly sending employees on errands using their personal vehicle, it would be prudent to confirm their vehicle liability coverage, which is listed on their declarations page. The minimum required liability insurance in Washington is $25,000, but higher policy limits offer better protection.

Was my employee on the clock?

This can be a complex legal question, but an employee running a company errand is generally acting within the scope of employment. If he causes a collision, the employer can be held legally and financially liable for the other driver's injuries and property damage. The errand may be unofficially classified as just a quick favor, but that is not a legal category. This is where having the right business liability insurance becomes essential. How this scenario integrates with Washington's wage and hour laws is a topic for another day.

What about my employee's injuries?

In Washington, when your employee is injured on the job, the employee is entitled to workers' compensation benefits through the Department of Labor & Industries, regardless of who caused the accident. L&I benefits can include medical care, wage replacement, and return to work support. Washington law requires almost all employers to carry workers' compensation insurance. If you are not paying L&I premiums, it's worth checking whether your business is required to have this coverage. Penalties for not providing L&I insurance to employees are significant.



Your injured employee may also be covered by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act and/or Washington's Paid Family and Medical Leave. These programs come with important responsibilities for employers. An HR specialist or employment attorney can offer guidance on what your business needs to do if your employee cannot return to work due to a medical condition.

The Bottom Line

Most of us did not start a business because we love paperwork and insurance policies, but addressing potential liabilities now can give us more time to focus on the work we enjoy. And while you're at it, check the printer paper supply – you might save someone a trip. ■

A Kitsap native, Ashley Armstrong has been practicing law for more than 20 years. She owns Armstrong Injury Law in Old Silverdale, where she and her team help injured people and their families navigate the legal process. This article is for general informational purposes only and is not legal advice. Consult an attorney for guidance about your specific situation.

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KITSAP MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES | 2025 COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

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September Membership Luncheon - State of Education in Kitsap



The work happening in our schools directly impacts workforce readiness, our future talent pipeline, and local employer's ability to find skilled people they need to grow their business.

The Greater Kitsap Chamber's September Membership luncheon brought together the business community with representatives from our local education systems for an update on the state of education in Kitsap. Representatives from the Bremerton School District, Central Kitsap School District, Olympic College, and WWU Peninsulas shared what opportunities and challenges lie ahead, and how they are preparing students to enter the workforce. ■

Eggs & Issues: A Kitsap Tradition

As the sun tries to break through the thick early morning cloud cover, the doors of the Cloverleaf Sports Bar & Grill open and welcome the public to the Greater Kitsap Chamber's Eggs & Issues candidate forums. It may be eight o'clock in the morning, but the audience, moderators, and candidates are wide awake, ready for a lively debate on the issues that matter most to the business community.

When the Bremerton Chamber of Commerce first created Eggs and Issues, the candidate forums quickly gained public support. Due to the leadership of former Bremerton Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Beverly Woods, who was passionate about the Chamber's role as an advocate for the local business community, Eggs & Issues became a staple of Kitsap's local election season. Speaking about the origins of Eggs & Issues, Woods explained, "I strongly believe a chamber's primary responsibilities are to foster a healthy business environment and advocate for its members at the local, state, and federal levels." Woods's prioritization of the Chamber's work in advocacy helped bridge the gap between Kitsap's business community and elected officials. With help from Jerry Reid, Ed Wolfe, Clarke Whitney, and others, the forums quickly became an essential touchpoint for candidates seeking to connect with the business community ahead of the elections. Leading up to the 2026 General Election in November, the Greater Kitsap Chamber hosted six candidate forums at the Cloverleaf Sports Bar & Grill. As the days grew colder and the sun rose a little later each morning, candidates from legislative races across the region shared their perspectives on the issues most affecting Kitsap businesses. Moderated by Alysa Grimes, the Chair of the Chamber's Advocacy Committee, the forums offered a unique opportunity to share the business community's legislative priorities. After spending the summer engaging with Kitsap businesses and discussing their legislative concerns, Grimes used those insights to keep the business community's concerns at the forefront of the debates. Audience members also had the opportunity to submit questions throughout the forums. While the location of Eggs & Issues has changed over the course of its twenty-nine-year history, the purpose of the forums remains the same. Reflecting on her proudest Eggs & Issues accomplishment, Woods pointed to the connections the debates fostered: "Eggs & Issues created a valuable exchange: elected officials and candidates learned about the business community's needs, while attendees gained insight into their perspectives and proposals." Today, the Greater Kitsap Chamber continues to build and facilitate that exchange, serving as a voice for the local business community in Olympia. ■



Celebrating Kitsap's Northern Lights: Businesses Under the Borealis



Last December, nearly 350 people joined the Greater Kitsap Chamber at its Annual Business Awards Gala to celebrate the best of Kitsap's business and nonprofit community.

The celebration was the largest to date, with awards presented to eight outstanding organizations and nearly $50,000 raised in support of the Greater Kitsap Chamber's ongoing work in advocacy, workforce development, and business and professional growth. Of that total, nearly $13,000 was raised through fundraising asks made during the event.

"This is one of my favorite events of the year for the Chamber," says Greater Kitsap Chamber President & CEO Irene Moyer, "The Business Awards Gala lets us reflect and celebrate the wins (and challenges) of 2026, but also helps invigorate us for the year ahead. Seeing the business and nonprofit communities come together under one roof, and hearing the actual partnerships and collaborations forming in real time is a treat to witness; all that is happening – on top of awards being handed out – it's just a great illustration of the power of Kitsap and the people who live, work and play here."

The Gala serves as the Chamber's primary fundraiser of the year, with proceeds supporting programs such as the inaugural Business & Tourism Summit in January, the Kitsap Women's Summit, the annual Legislative Hill Climb, Military Appreciation Day and so much more.

This year, the Chamber's annual celebration, "Celebrating Kitsap's Northern Lights: Businesses Under the Borealis," will be held on December 11, 2026, at the Kitsap Conference Center.

Six awards will be presented this year, including:

- Pioneer Business of the Year (15+ years in Kitsap)
- Natalie E. Bryson Business of the Year
- Dr. Glen Gordon New Business of the Year
- Hospitality Business of the Year
- Nonprofit of the Year
- Festival/Event of the Year

The Greater Kitsap Chamber, a 501(c)(6) organization representing nearly 600 members across the West Sound region, received more than 100 nominations this year across the six award categories.

Finalists were announced in mid-October, representing a diverse range of organizations, from major employers like Tessera and Kitsap Credit Union to small but mighty solopreneurs such as Honeybee Horticulture. ■

2026 Business Awards Gala Nominees

Natalie E. Bryson Business of the Year

BC Fitness Studio
Help Desk Cavalry
Indigo Plum
Kitsap Bank
Lisa Stirrett Creative Warrior Studio & Holy Grounds Coffee Co
Lucky Star Consignment Clothing

Event/Festival of the Year

Bremerton Fan Zone
Kitsap Great Give/Celebration of Philanthropy
Krampus Bremerton
Poulsbo Film Festival Foundation
Whaling Days

Hospitality Business of the Year

Ahoy Kitsap Playland LLC
Cloverleaf Sports Bar & Grill
Fairfield Inn & Suites Bremerton
Honeybee Horticulture
Jolie Bean Coffee
Lost Barn Event Rentals
McCloud's Grill House
Oxford Suites
Port Gamble
Silverdale KettleFish
State 42 Wines
The Toad House Pizza and Lounge

Dr. Glen Gordon New Business of the Year

Aden Chiropractic
Anytime Fitness
Bee Hill Bakery
Bremerton Black Market
Honeybee Horticulture
Kitsap Business Magazine (Ward Media)
Lavalyn Inspections LLC
Milestone Marketing LLC

** Finalists are marked in yellow.*

Common L&I Mistakes Small Businesses Make and How to Avoid Them

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.

GREATER KITSAP CHAMBER & VISITOR CENTE

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

In partnership with the Depar of Labor & Industries for emp outreach and education.

No small business owner wants a knock on the door from Washington State's Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) only to realize they are unprepared for an inspection. Fortunately, L&I offers a wealth of resources to help businesses avoid common compliance mistakes. By identifying these issues in advance, businesses can determine whether they are in compliance before L&I arrives.

Mistake #1: Not Having an Accident Prevention Program

One of the most frequently cited safety violations is failing to have a written safety program, or Accident Prevention Program (APP). Every employer is required to create a written APP that addresses the safety and health hazards present in their workplace.

L&I provides free APP templates that can be customized to fit your workplace. Taking the time to create this plan not only establishes important safety procedures required for your employees but can also help you avoid a violation.

View L&I's Sample APP Templates here: Lni.wa.gov/AccidentPrevention

Mistake #2: Failing to Conduct Safety Meetings or Committee Meetings

Compliance does not end once your business has a written safety program. In addition to an APP, employers are required to have a method for communicating and evaluating safety and health concerns raised by employees. Specific safety meeting requirements vary by industry, but employers must hold regular safety meetings regardless of their business size or industry.

Employee participation in safety committees and meetings can strengthen your workplace safety culture and help prevent costly workplace injuries. Make sure your business has a comprehensive safety program that includes training, inspections, and employee involvement.

For more information about safety meeting and committee requirements, visit: Lni.wa.gov/SafetyCommittees

Mistake #3: Mishandling Paid Sick Leave

Paid sick leave requirements are a common source of confusion for employers and can lead to L&I inspections or violations.

All employers in Washington State are required to provide paid sick leave to their employees. Establishing a formal written policy and maintaining accurate payroll systems that track leave usage can help businesses avoid common paid sick leave compliance mistakes.

L&I provides a variety of resources to help businesses comply with paid sick leave laws: Lni.wa.gov/PaidSickLeave

Mistake #4: Violating Meal and Rest Break Requirements

Employees have the right to submit complaints to L&I regarding workplace violations. Businesses should ensure they are paying employees correctly and providing the required meal and rest breaks.

Avoiding this violation is simple: train supervisors and managers on Washington State's meal and rest break requirements. For every 4 hours

See **COMMON MISTAKES, 30**

Old Town Mercantile - Byron Street Bites
Pelican Plumbing
Photonatix Photobooth and Beyond
PNW Tours & Adventures
Serengeti Care
Shirtify LLC
Spread Supplies
Sun Kissed Exteriors
The Kids' Dentist Silverdale
Winkler Barber Works
Zen Dragon Martial Arts

Nonprofit of the Year

Admiral Theatre
Blue Star Banner Program
Bremerton Backpack Brigade
Downtown Bremerton Association
Fairy Tale TruBridge Foundation
Fishline
Habitat For Humanity of Kitsap County
Holly Ridge Center
Kitsap Building Association
Kitsap Community Foundation
Kitsap Pride Foundation
Knights Community Hospital Equipment Lend Program (KC HELP)
Peninsula Community Health Services
Support the Enlisted Project (STEP)
Trillium Employment Services
YMCA
YMCA of Kitsap Haselwood

Pioneer Business of the Year

Blue Sky Printing
Bremerton City Nursery
Comfort Keepers
Dana's Heating & Cooling
First Fed Bank
Kitsap Bank
Kitsap Credit Union
Liberty Bank
Miller-Woodlawn Funeral Home & Memorial Park
Noo-Kayet Investments
Peaks Financial
Salish Orthodontics
Tessera
Unique Experience Custom Embroidery

** Finalists are marked in yellow.*

September Chamber: Off the Clock



In September, Chamber: Off the Clock brought attendees to Bremerton Foodline for an evening of networking and community building. Attendees had the opportunity to learn about the Foodline's incredible work, including the various programs it has implemented to support our community, while enjoying delicious charcuterie provided by Honeybee Horticulture. Thank you, Bremerton Foodline, for sharing your space with us and reminding us of the importance of collaboration in building a stronger Kitsap. ■



New & Renewing Memberships for September

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

Main Street

JC Madison Inc. (2023)

Spaeth Transfer, Inc. (1965)

Business

Armstrong Injury Law (2025)

Brookside Landscape and Design (2016)

Cedar Glen Mobile Home Park LLC. (2025)

Charlie's Heating, Cooling, and Electrical (2026)

Cross Sound Law Group, PLLC (2026)

Gennaro Contracting LLC (2024)

Kitsap Community Foundation (2013)

Kitsap Humane Society (1989)

Noo-Kayet Investments (2023)

PC Networks Inc (2008)

Peninsula Dance Theatre (2025)

Poseidon Restoration (2025)

Scandia Studio (2022)

Spruce Properties (2025)

Support CK Students (2026)

The Circle Leader (2025)

Trident Harley Davidson (2026)

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

Common Mistakes, *from page 29*

worked, an employee must receive a paid rest period of at least 10 minutes. A meal period of at least 30 minutes must be offered whenever an employee works over five hours in a shift. Learn more about worker rights and workplace complaints: Lni.wa.gov/MealAndRestBreaks

Mistake #5: Misclassifying Workers as Independent Contractors

In Washington, every worker is presumed to be a "covered worker" for workers' compensation purposes unless they fall under one of the narrow exceptions established by law. Simply calling someone an independent contractor or giving them a 1099 does not automatically exempt you from your legal obligation to cover them with workers' compensation insurance.

If the person you hire or contract with is considered a covered worker under Washington state workers' compensation law, you have certain legal responsibilities as an employer, including maintaining accurate records, paying workers' compensation premiums, and complying with state employment laws.

However, simply calling someone an independent contractor does not automatically exempt you from your legal obligation to pay workers' compensation premiums. Visit L&I's Independent Contractor resources to ensure you're in compliance: Lni.wa.gov/IndependentContractor

Be Proactive Before an Inspection

The biggest mistake a business can make is waiting until an inspection occurs before addressing safety concerns. L&I provides free, confidential safety consultations that can help identify workplace hazards and strengthen safety programs.

These consultations do not result in fines or penalties. However, businesses will be asked to correct any serious workplace hazards that are identified. Request your free consultation:Lni.wa.gov/Consultation. ■

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- Guidance whether you're starting out or scaling up.



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BUSINESS Briefs

Ward Media launches West Sound News, expanding local journalism coverage in Kitsap County

Free digital news platform will cover Poulsbo, North Kitsap and communities throughout the county, with a daily morning brief newsletter launching Dec. 1

Ward Media is expanding its presence in Kitsap County with the launch of West Sound News, a free digital news platform providing local reporting on government, business, education, public safety, sports and community life.

The new website, westsoundnews.com, is now live, with a free daily email newsletter scheduled to launch Tuesday, Dec. 1. The newsletter will arrive in subscribers' inboxes by 6 a.m., delivering the day's top local headlines and community updates.

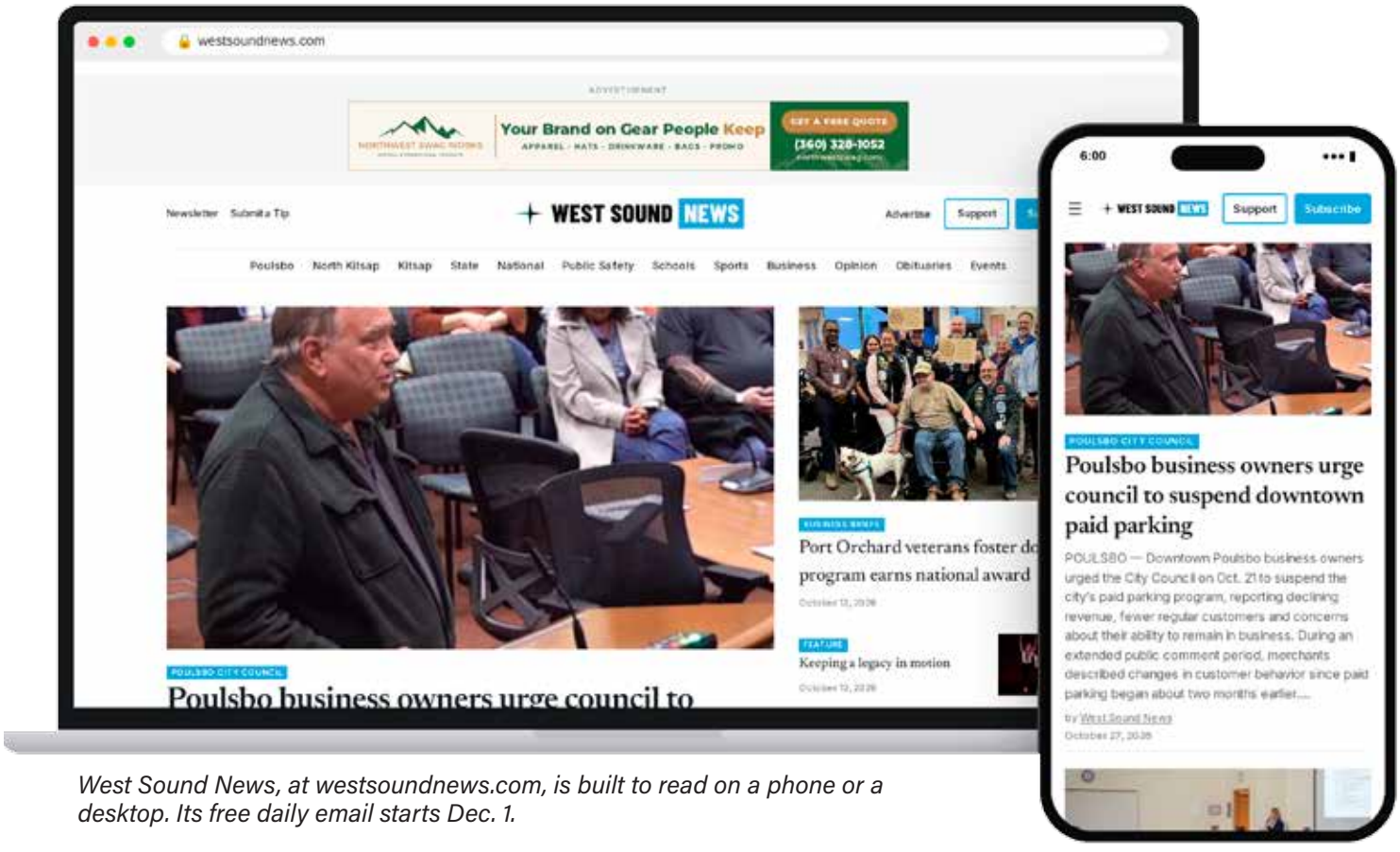
West Sound News joins Ward Media's growing portfolio of local publications, including Kitsap Business magazine, Hey Neighbor! Kitsap and Hey Neighbor! Olympic.

Unlike many digital news platforms, West Sound News will operate without a paywall, making its reporting accessible to all readers. The publication will be supported through local advertising, sponsorships and voluntary reader contributions.

"Kitsap has more going on than ever and fewer people covering it. West Sound News is our answer: real reporting from people who live here, free for everyone, and in your inbox before your first cup of coffee," said Terry Ward, Ward Media's founder, CEO and publisher.

Expanding local news coverage

The launch represents another investment in community journalism by Ward Media, an independently owned media company founded in 2023.



West Sound News, at westsoundnews.com, is built to read on a phone or a desktop. Its free daily email starts Dec. 1.

West Sound News will initially emphasize Poulsbo and North Kitsap while covering issues affecting communities throughout Kitsap County.

Coverage will include city and county government, economic development, transportation, schools, public safety and community events. The publication will also feature high school athletics, including scores, schedules and a weekly Kitsap prep sports scoreboard.

North Kitsap reporting will encompass Kingston, Hansville, Suquamish, Indianola, Keyport and Port Gamble. Stories from those communities will also appear under the North Kitsap News name at northkitsap.news.

Business journalism will be a central component of the new publication, with reporting produced in collaboration with Kitsap Business magazine.

Stories and columns from Kitsap Business will also appear in West Sound News' business section, expanding the reach of the magazine's coverage of local entrepreneurs, employers, economic trends and business leaders.

Ward Media plans to expand West Sound News' geographic coverage in 2027, bringing more original reporting to additional communities throughout Kitsap County. The expansion will build on the publication's initial focus on Poulsbo and North Kitsap, with the goal of providing more comprehensive coverage of local government, businesses, schools and community issues across the county.

Local team leads expansion

Quinn Propst, a staff reporter for Kitsap Business, will cover Poulsbo, North Kitsap and countywide issues for both publications.

Ward will also contribute reporting and editorial content to the website.

Amy Yaley, Ward Media's co-founder and chief operating officer, will oversee advertising sales and business partnerships, while multimedia account executive Harmony Liebert will work directly with local advertisers.

Ward previously served as vice president of Sound Publishing, where he led Kitsap News Group until 2023. His return to the Kitsap news market through Ward Media builds on his previous experience overseeing community publications in the region.

Community participation encouraged

West Sound News is designed to provide residents, businesses and community organizations with opportunities to contribute information and participate in local news coverage.

The publication will accept news tips, press releases, letters to the editor, community announcements and sports submissions.

Families and funeral homes can submit obituaries for publication at no charge. Community organizations can also add events to the website's calendar through free basic listings, with paid featured listings available.

Coaches, parents and athletic departments are

encouraged to submit high school sports scores, photographs and team updates. Submissions can be made through forms on the website or by emailing news@westsoundnews.com.

Readers who wish to financially support local reporting can make voluntary, one-time contributions. Because Ward Media is a for-profit business, contributions are not tax-deductible.

Advertising and founding partnerships

As part of the launch, Ward Media is introducing a Founding Partner sponsorship program offering six exclusive opportunities to local businesses. Each sponsorship will be limited to one business per category, providing participating companies with prominent visibility across the West Sound News website and in every edition of its daily newsletter.

The program is intended to connect local businesses with readers while establishing a sustainable advertising foundation for the publication.

Businesses interested in advertising or Founding Partner opportunities can visit westsoundnews.com/advertising, email harmony@ward.media or call 360-328-1052.

The launch further expands Ward Media's Kitsap County operations, connecting its existing business journalism and community marketing products with a broader digital news audience.

Readers can subscribe to the free daily newsletter at westsoundnews.com/newsletter and follow West Sound News on Facebook and Instagram at @westsoundnews. ■

Kitsap Business and West Sound News are both owned and published by Ward Media.

$12,000 grant will let Olympic College offer free mental health training to up to 300 people

A $12,000 grant from the Bainbridge Community Foundation will pay to certify an Olympic College faculty member as a Mental Health First Aid instructor, allowing the college to offer the training free to up to 300 participants.

Mental Health First Aid teaches people to recognize and respond to signs of mental health or substance use challenges and connect others with support, without diagnosing or providing therapy. Olympic College said keeping instruction in-house with its own faculty, rather than outside contractors, makes the program more sustainable and cost-effective.

Grant funding has supported the college's program since 2019, and it has served about 60 participants per quarter, according to the college.

"This funding will help us expand access to valuable mental health training and strengthen our campus community's ability to recognize when someone may need support," said Olympic College President Chantae Recasner.

Debbie Kuffel, the foundation's program and finance officer, said mental health support was identified as a priority in the foundation's annual nonprofit survey.

The next training session is Nov. 17 at the Bremerton campus. More information is on Olympic College's Well-Being and Health Promotion page.

State gets $13.2 million to retrain workers, help employers pay for training

The Washington Employment Security Department has received $13.2 million in two U.S. Department of Labor grants to help workers train for and land jobs, including money for a new fund that will partially reimburse employers for training their workers.

A $6.7 million Industry-Driven Skills Training Fund grant will pay to set up a statewide, outcome-based fund, run with the Washington Workforce Association, that reimburses eligible employers for training workers in shipbuilding, nuclear energy, AI infrastructure, aerospace, advanced manufacturing and other industries. Employers can be reimbursed when an eligible employee completes training and stays with the company for at least six months. Training may include customized instruction, on-the-job training, registered apprenticeships and partnerships with community and technical colleges.

The department and its partners are in an initial planning phase with the Labor Department. Employers can expect information about eligibility and how to take part after Jan. 1, 2027. The project is set to run 45 months.

A separate $6.5 million Rapid Reskill Employment Recovery National Dislocated Worker grant will help people who lost their jobs through no fault of their own move into jobs, registered apprenticeships or paid work-based learning over three years. Workers will be connected to employer-linked training in advanced manufacturing, aerospace, construction infrastructure, healthcare, clean technology and other sectors, with case managers through WorkSource.

"These grants will help people learn new skills and get back to work," said Martin McMurry, the department's interim commissioner. "This is a welcome opportunity to partner with key employers to train and employ workers in industries critical to our state."

More information is available from WorkSource Washington and the Washington Workforce Association.

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Recruitment

Your Hiring Process Called. It Needs an Update.



By Monica Blackwood President & CEO West Sound Workforce

Some job descriptions and ads have impressive longevity. They have survived three supervisors, two software changes and several rounds of "just use the posting from last time." Unfortunately, longevity does not guarantee accuracy. Washington's hiring rules have changed, and some familiar language and routines deserve a fresh look. Before you recycle that next posting, pour yourself a cup of coffee and check three areas.

Does your cashier really need a driver's license?

If your cashier makes deliveries, perhaps. If the driving involved is getting to work, that is a different conversation. A delivery driver? That connection is clear. Someone ringing up purchases behind a counter? A license requirement probably needs to leave the description.

Since July 27, 2025, Washington employers cannot require a valid driver's license as a condition of employment, or include that requirement in a posting, unless driving is an essential job function or serves a legitimate business purpose for the position.

Review your minimum qualifications, application questions and posting templates. Ask what the employee actually needs to do. Getting to work reliably does not automatically require driving there.

And yes, a driver's license can still serve as an acceptable identity document for Form I-9. Employees choose which acceptable documents to present; the license establishes identity, rather than employment authorization by itself.

A background check needs the right place in line

The updated Washington Fair Chance Act changes both when employers can check criminal history and how they respond to the results, making a "best practice" now the rule. The changes took effect July 1, 2026 for employers with 15 or more employees. Employers with fewer than 15 employees join them January 1, 2027.

For covered positions, first determine that the candidate meets the basic qualifications and extend a conditional offer. Then inquire about criminal history or run the criminal background check. Certain positions are exempt, including some involving unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults and positions subject to specific legal requirements.

The results of the check also require thoughtful handling. Arrest records without convictions and juvenile conviction records generally cannot support an adverse employment decision, although the law includes a limited exception for certain pending adult cases. Separately, Washington law allows people with vacated convictions to state on employment applications that they were never convicted of those crimes.

An adult conviction calls for an individualized assessment tied to a legitimate business reason. Consider the conduct, time elapsed, job duties and information about rehabilitation, education and work experience. Document that assessment.

Before taking adverse action, identify the record causing concern and hold the position open for at least two business days, giving the person a reasonable opportunity to explain or correct it. If you proceed, provide a written decision documenting your reasoning and consideration of the relevant factors. Other background-check requirements may require additional steps or time.

There is another paperwork update: telling an applicant about a post-offer background check triggers requirements to provide a written summary of specified protections and the attorney general's Fair Chance Act guide.

Many employers already practiced individualized review. Now, the process needs to be built into the hiring routine.

Give your job posting a pay check

The Equal Pay and Opportunities Act has updates, too. Rules effective earlier this year clarify that an applicant includes anyone applying to a posting for a specific available position. Applicants have protections under the act before their first day on payroll.

For employers with 15 or more employees, postings must include the wage scale or salary range, plus general descriptions of benefits and other compensation, as has been law. Clarification came regarding a position having a fixed wage. If that's the case, disclose that amount. No creative range required.

There is also an opportunity to fix posting mistakes. Through July 2027, employers receiving written notice of a noncompliant posting have five business days to correct it and, when applicable, demand correction from the third-party posting service.

Digital copies republished without the employer's consent are excluded from the posting definition. That differs from an advertisement you authorized someone to publish.

Your next step is manageable: review the templates, update the sequence and bring everyone who hires into the conversation. Talk with your legal team about the changes, too.

That old posting may have served you well. Give it a refresh before it recruits your next employee. ■

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

Executive Q&A

Meet Kelly Jeannotte, Executive Director of Bainbridge Youth Services



By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Kelly Jeannotte, executive director of Bainbridge Youth Services, leads the nonprofit's efforts to support young people and families throughout Kitsap County. ***Photo courtesy of Olya Blase***

For nearly 65 years, Bainbridge Youth Services has helped young people navigate challenges, build confidence and find connection. Based on Bainbridge Island and serving youth throughout Kitsap County, the nonprofit provides free counseling for young people ages 13-21, peer tutoring, youth programs and resources for parents and families.

Executive Director Kelly Jeannotte, who previously served as interim director, is focused on strengthening the organization for the future while ensuring young people can access the support they need today. In this Executive Q&A, Jeannotte discusses the changing needs of local youth, the importance of belonging and community partnerships, and her priorities for sustaining and expanding BYS's work as the organization approaches its 65th anniversary in January 2027.

What drew you to Bainbridge Youth Services, and what has kept you connected to the organization?

I was drawn to BYS's mission and the essential services it provides to our community. Offering this level of professional support to young people at no cost is an extraordinary commitment to their well-being. BYS puts into practice something I deeply believe in: that every young person deserves access to support, opportunities to grow and a community that believes in them. By providing free counseling, peer tutoring and youth programs, we help make that support part of young people's everyday lives. My commitment to this work is both professional and personal. My background in psychology, child development and education centers on understanding what helps young people thrive. Growing up with parents who were public defenders also shaped my understanding of fairness and the importance of standing up for people whose voices may be overlooked. My own experiences with inclusion and advocacy as a teenager reinforced how powerful belonging can be. At BYS, those

values guide work that has a direct impact on young people and families.

You were appointed executive director after serving as interim director. What does this next chapter mean to you?

Leading BYS is an opportunity to carry forward more than six decades of community investment in young people while preparing the organization for the future. Serving as interim director allowed me to understand our strengths, identify opportunities for improvement and begin strengthening the systems behind our services. As executive director, my responsibility is to turn that work into lasting organizational strength. That means supporting our staff, maintaining high standards of care, building sustainable funding and making thoughtful decisions about growth. I'm grateful for the board's confidence and proud to lead an organization whose purpose is so clear: helping young people feel supported, connected and hopeful about their futures.

How would you describe the needs you're seeing among young people and families in our community right now?

We're seeing a need for both professional mental health care and meaningful connection. Young people are managing academic pressure, relationships, questions about identity and uncertainty about their futures. Some are experiencing anxiety, grief, or loneliness that affects their daily lives. Even young people who appear to be doing well can be carrying more than others realize. With limited mental health resources in Kitsap County, finding an available provider who works well with teens can be difficult, and cost can create another obstacle. BYS removes that financial barrier by providing free counseling specifically for youth ages 13-21. We give youth a place to turn to and help make getting support feel more approachable.

We also want young people to understand that they do not need to wait for a crisis to ask for help. They deserve opportunities to talk openly, understand themselves and develop skills for navigating challenges. Our work



Under the leadership of Executive Director Kelly Jeannotte, Bainbridge Youth Services continues its work to help young people feel supported, connected and equipped to face challenges. Photo courtesy of Olya Blase



is about helping them feel better today while building confidence, connection and coping skills they can carry into the future.

BYS counselors are licensed therapists and clinical interns. Counseling can improve young people's quality of life both now and in the years ahead. By learning to understand their emotions, establish boundaries, and build healthy relationships, they develop skills they can draw on throughout their lives. Our data shows that 86 percent of youth clients assessed by BYS counselors in the previous quarter rated their overall well-being as "much improved" or "very much improved." Nearly nine in ten youth who completed surveys showed measurable improvement in their mental health, with more than half rating it as "much improved" or "very much improved." Youth completed data showed gains in coping skills, confidence, and understanding themselves and others. These skills can help young people navigate challenges and build healthier relationships throughout their lives. Young people turn to BYS for support weekly. We remain committed to providing these services because the need is clear and our outcome data demonstrates their effectiveness.

What do you think is most important for young people to have in order to feel supported, connected and hopeful?

Young people need to know that they matter and they experience that through the way adults listen, respond and follow through. They need dependable relationships, opportunities to contribute and environments where they can explore who they are without fear of being dismissed.

My work in positive developmental psychology shapes how I approach this. We support well-being by helping young people develop strengths, purpose, meaningful connections and confidence in their ability to navigate challenges. At BYS, that can happen in a counseling session, through a supportive tutoring/mentoring relationship, or by participating in a youth program. Each is an opportunity for a young person to experience belonging and recognize their own capacity to grow.

BYS offers a range of services, from counseling to peer tutoring and youth programs. How do these different pieces work together to support young people?

Our programs address connected parts of a young person's life. Counseling helps youth understand their emotions, strengthen coping skills and work through challenges. Peer tutoring supports academic learning while giving students opportunities to build confidence and supportive relationships. Youth programs create space for connection, leadership, learning and participation. Together, these services offer multiple ways to find support. A young person may first visit for tutoring, become comfortable in our space and later feel more confident asking for help in another area. A peer tutor can experience the purpose and responsibility that come from helping someone else succeed. Across our programs, we are helping young people build skills and relationships they can carry forward.

Parents also received support through the Parent Connect program, which served more than 110 parents in 2025. The program offers parents an opportunity to speak with a therapist, ask questions, and discuss concerns about their child's well-being, regardless of their child's age.

What have you learned from the young people and families BYS serves that has influenced the way you approach your work?

Their perspectives reinforce the importance of making support practical, welcoming and responsive. Offering a service is only the beginning. We must also consider whether young people know it exists, can access it and feel understood when they arrive. That influences how we support our staff and design programs that respond to young people's needs. We need to listen, examine barriers and be willing to adjust. Youth input and program evaluation are essential to that process. I want us to understand what young people find helpful, what is changing for them and whose needs we may be missing. Their experiences should shape the decisions



Photos courtesy of BYS



we make. I especially enjoy participating in our Youth Advisory Board meetings and hearing directly from young people about their ideas and priorities.

How do you see the role of community partnerships in supporting youth mental health and well-being?

Supporting teens and young adults is a shared community responsibility. Schools, healthcare providers, nonprofits, businesses and families each have opportunities to recognize needs, offer encouragement and connect youth with resources. Strong partnerships turn that shared commitment into action. They help us reach more young people, improve referrals, address barriers and build understanding of mental health. My priority is to develop relationships that produce practical benefits for youth and families. When organizations communicate well and work toward common goals, we can create more dependable pathways to support.

What are some of the biggest challenges facing BYS as a nonprofit organization, and how are you approaching them?

Keeping services free requires sustained investment. We need skilled staff, consistent funding and reliable systems to deliver high-quality care and respond thoughtfully as needs change. I'm approaching those responsibilities by strengthening financial oversight, operational processes, clinical reporting and program evaluation. Those investments support our team and help us make informed decisions about where resources are needed most.

We also have a responsibility to communicate our impact clearly. Donors and community partners should understand what their contributions make possible. A strong organization earns trust through both compassionate service and accountable leadership.

What are your priorities for BYS over the next year or two?

My priorities are to strengthen access to services, support our staff and build the financial stability necessary to sustain our work. We are also expanding outreach, strengthening partnerships and creating more opportunities for young people to help shape our programs. Evaluation will remain central to those efforts. We need to understand who we are reaching, what outcomes young people are experiencing and where we can improve. That allows us to grow with purpose and direct resources toward work that makes a meaningful difference.

In January 2027, BYS will celebrate 65 years of serving young people and families. This milestone gives us an opportunity to honor the people who built and sustained BYS and invite our community to help shape its future. We want the next generation to inherit an organization that is strong, accessible and responsive to their needs.

Are there areas where you see opportunities for BYS to expand or strengthen its services?

BYS is expanding its well-being initiatives to complement counseling and hopes to broaden its public mental health





Kelly Jeannotte is focused on strengthening Bainbridge Youth Services and expanding access to resources for young people in the community.
Photo courtesy of Olya Blase







Photo courtesy of Olya Blase

Executive Director Kelly Jeannotte discusses the needs of local youth and the role Bainbridge Youth Services plays in connecting them with support and resources.

education efforts. Offering a wider range of therapeutic approaches could also help the organization reach more young people.

BYS aims to strengthen support for neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ youth and families, participate more actively in community Pride activities, and build stronger partnerships with community groups. These efforts will consider how intersecting identities shape young people's experiences, needs, and access to support.

Based on Bainbridge Island, BYS is part of the broader Kitsap community. Its free services are available to young people throughout Kitsap County, and the organization looks forward to connecting more youth with support.

What role do donors, volunteers and community members play in making BYS's work possible?

Community support makes BYS's free services possible. Donations fund counseling, sustain programs, and provide the staff and space young people depend on. Volunteers contribute their time, skills, and care, while peer tutors demonstrate how young people can support one another.

This month, an anonymous donor has committed to matching up to $20,000 in donations, helping contributions go even further.

There are many ways to contribute, including donating, volunteering, attending an event, introducing a potential community partner, or helping a family learn about BYS. Consistent support allows the organization to plan ahead and keep its services dependable and accessible.

When you look ahead, what do you hope BYS will accomplish for young people and families in the years to come?

I want BYS to remain a trusted resource that young people can turn to with confidence. I want families to know where to find support, and I want our services to evolve alongside the people we serve. Our long-term contribution is helping young people build skills, relationships and confidence that continue to support them as they move through life. That means responding to current challenges while creating opportunities for belonging, purpose and growth. As we approach our 65th anniversary, I'm thinking about both the young people who need us today and those who will walk through our doors in the years ahead. My goal is to help ensure that BYS will be ready for them – with compassionate care, a strong organization and a community committed to their future. ■

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The People Behind the Magic at Kingston Public Market



As another season at Kingston Public Market comes to a close, there's plenty to celebrate! From May through October, Mike Wallace Park was filled with local artisans, live music, sweet treats, fresh produce, beautiful flowers, and a community of shoppers enjoying those unbeatable waterfront views. This year, the market welcomed a record number of artisans and guests, making the not-so-little market bigger than ever!

Each Sunday offered something for everyone, from fresh flowers and produce to handmade artwork, jewelry, cards, toys, apparel, and home goods. Everything was handmade or thoughtfully curated, with a distinctly Pacific Northwest feel. It was the perfect place to discover something special while supporting local makers.

But behind the market-day magic is a whole lot of teamwork! Zoe Poulakis, Alex Sanford, Jaymee Sotomayor, Meagan Foley, Jan Nielsen, Amy Harper, and Jim Skewes work behind the scenes alongside the market's wonderful managers and dedicated volunteers. From organizing vendors and gathering sponsorships to creating artwork, planning music, setting up tents and signs, and making sure everyone feels welcome, it takes a whole team to bring the market to life. Their time, creativity, and dedication make it all possible!

Although the season has wrapped up, planning for next year is already underway. The market is truly a labor of love, and the team takes great pride in how much it has grown.

For those missing their favorite local makers, some market vendors will pop up again at the **Hometown Holiday Night Market at Cup & Muffin on November 29, from 4–7 p.m.** It's another opportunity to shop local and keep that Kingston community magic going!

Market updates and information about the generous sponsors who help make it all possible are available at www.visit-kpm.com. Their support is an essential part of bringing this beloved community gathering to life. ■



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- Hood Canal Brewery

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Cellar Cat. Dana Goodfellow & the Kingston 4th of July Committee, Mark Libby, Port Gamble Theater, Grocery Outlet

Thankful Is Easy. Kind is Harder.

Kindness. Harder to do than being thankful.

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

My oldest granddaughter recently completed a month-long volleyball camp put on by Poulsbo Parks & Recreation. There were easily 25 to 30 girls, ages 9 and 10, participating and having fun. I had the dual role of driver and proud Pops who got to watch her play.

At the end of the camp, the coach called all the girls together to send them off. The coach is young, probably in her 20s, and a great role model for these preteen girls. She told them how much they had improved and reminded them to thank their parents. But her "parting shot" was what caught my attention most.

A Parting Shot

"Please be kind to each other..."

She didn't just leave that statement hanging; she explained why being kind was important. I hope the girls heard her. I know the old guy chauffeuring his granddaughter did.

As we creep into the home stretch of the calendar year, the air is getting crisper, the decorations are coming out of the garages, and election campaigns are blaring. So are the social media posts and comments from people who aren't even on the ballot.

I also see the vitriol often hurled at athletes who play for our favorite teams. It feels like recency bias is most on display among sports fans (and I'm not immune to it), who call for coaches to be fired and players to be benched, sometimes in the same calendar year they achieved tremendous success.

And so it goes in life...

These conditions aren't new. They're just amplified by our ability to post our own unfiltered op-eds on social media. We're buoyed by those who comment in support and angered when others have contrarian views, especially in politics.



When the young coach urged her campers to be kind to each other, it dawned on me that her words apply to all of us.

As we enter the month when we celebrate Thanksgiving, it seems to me that it's harder to show kindness than it is to be thankful.

Thankful vs. Kind

Over the years, I've read and listened to many a motivational speaker extolling gratitude and leading with a "heart" for being thankful. While I'm sure there's an audience that needs that reminder, my experience is that the humans I've met tend to gravitate toward being thankful. It may not be how they lead their day, but their gratitude for the people in their lives, the businesses they run or work for, and the opportunities they've been given tends to come through.

I don't know if I can say the same about kindness.

Much of the unkindness seems to happen when the person or group being singled out isn't even in the room. It plays out in social media posts, cyberbullying, and gatherings where nearly everyone shares the same point of view.

The damage comes when it spreads. It's one thing to have a differing point of view; that's healthy, and debate is good. It's quite another to be mean-spirited, hurtful, and vulgar to other people.

The most sobering part? Just as we've seemingly grown numb to violence in our schools to the point that it's been normalized, we've also normalized cruelty on social media and within groups of like-minded thinkers (see: political parties).

In this month of giving thanks, I'd like to suggest we add one more objective. How about we work at being kinder? My suggestion isn't limited to the keyboard. Let's take a closer look at our words, our behaviors, and even our thoughts.

The Anatomy of Kindness

Let's start by understanding the "anatomy" of kindness. If we reverse-engineer an unkind act, whether it's a social media post, a harsh word, or a cruel joke, it all starts in our heads.

We're human. I catch myself being vitriolic toward both myself and others. We're emotional beings, and that's normal. What breaks the chain is what we do at that point.

The 24-Hour Rule

I've coached high school basketball and golf for over a decade. One of the best "rules" I set for myself was the 24-hour rule. Regardless of the result, I wouldn't discuss the game or make decisions until one full day had passed. That gave me time to let emotions subside, review the game more clearly, and keep recency bias from seeping in. It also helped me help the players improve. There's a huge difference between a player feeling accountability and feeling abandonment.

This same 24-hour rule works just as well in the workplace, in organizations, in the classroom, and with friends.

Being kind starts with ourselves. We're most tolerant of others when we're first tolerant of ourselves. The next step is to allow time before acting. Finally, we can commit to remembering that we're dealing with other humans, who deserve kindness just like we do.

In honor of the young coach who set a great example, let me send you off into November with her simple exhortation: Be kind to each other. ■

Fall Allergies or a Cold? How to Tell the Difference



Jenn Downes Pearson | Marketing Coordinator, The Doctors Clinic

Sniffling and sneezing? Here's how to determine what's to blame.

As the air turns crisp and the leaves start falling, you may suddenly find yourself sneezing and sniffling. Your eyes may also be watery, and you may even feel like your head is in the clouds. When this happens, how do you know if you're dealing with fall allergies or if you've caught a cold? The symptoms can be similar, which can make it tricky to determine what's to blame.

Allergies vs. Colds: What's the Difference?

Here's a brief overview of these common conditions that highlights some differences to make it easier to figure out what may be causing your symptoms:

- Allergies are your body's way of overreacting to things like ragweed pollen, mold or dust. Common symp toms include sneezing, a runny or stuffy nose, itchy eyes and sometimes an itchy throat or ears. You usually won't get a fever. Your symptoms can last for weeks if you're around the trigger.
- Colds are caused by a virus. They can start with a sore throat, then move on to congestion, a runny nose, sneezing, mild fatigue, body aches and sometimes a cough. You might get a low-grade fever. Symptoms usually clear up within 7 to 10 days.



If your eyes are itchy and watery, allergies are more likely to blame. If you're feeling achy, tired or have a fever, it's probably a cold.



What About the Flu or COVID-19?

The flu and COVID-19 can have symptoms that are similar to colds, but they tend to cause more severe fatigue and body aches, as well as higher fevers. Newer strains of COVID-19 may also cause symptoms such as a very painful, scratchy sore throat (referred to as "razor blade throat"), hoarseness or a raspy voice.

Tips to Feel Better This Fall

Whether allergies or a cold are causing your symptoms, all you want to do is feel better. Here are some tips that can help:

If it's allergies:

- Keep windows closed during high pollen days.
- Shower and change clothes after spending time outside.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Use a saline nasal rinse to wash allergens out of your nose.
- Try over-the-counter antihistamines or nasal sprays to ease symptoms (follow directions carefully).

If it's a cold:

- Rest as much as possible and drink plenty of fluids.
- Use a humidifier to help with congestion.
- Wash your hands often to help prevent the spread of germs.
- Listen to your body. If you feel run-down, take it easy.
- Try over-the-counter cold medicines to ease symptoms (follow directions carefully).

Allergies and colds can make you feel pretty similar, but paying attention to specific symptoms and when they're at their worst can help you figure out what's going on. Keep in mind that allergies usually stick around as long as you're exposed to your triggers and don't cause fever, while colds are short-lived but can make you feel more run-down. And remember that flu and COVID-19 can also be possible culprits. If your symptoms are severe, last longer than expected or you're not sure what's causing them, it's a good idea to check in with your doctor. ■

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VISIT Kitsap



Would a Journalist Cover Your Business? Here's What Gets Their Attention

By Aljolynn Sperber | Executive Director for Visit Kitsap Peninsula

In September, I attended Travel & Words, a conference that connects travel journalists with destinations throughout the Northwest region. I was there representing Bainbridge Island, with 12 minutes to meet each journalist and explore possible stories.



We talked about everything from pickleball and unusual landmarks to Japanese American history, local farms and the sounds of traditional mochi pounding.

One writer was interested in how a grocery store could help tell the story of Bainbridge's Japanese American community. Another wanted to meet local growers and small business owners. Others were interested in unusual discoveries, including Frog Rock.

It got me thinking about how many interesting stories we have throughout Kitsap that haven't been told.

So what gets a journalist's attention?

Sometimes it's something unusual, even a little weird. Other times it's a local connection to something happening nationally or globally, a public figure with ties to the community, or a timely event or anniversary.

Take pickleball. The sport was invented on Bainbridge Island in 1965 and is now played around the world.

That's a local story with international appeal, especially when you connect it to the people and places behind its history.

I'd encourage businesses to start noticing the small things. What do customers find fascinating that you've stopped noticing? Does your business have an unusual history, tradition or employee with an interesting background?

Start a running list of story ideas. Include dates, possible interview contacts and supporting details. Set up free Google Alerts for your industry and related topics. Pay attention to emerging trends and consider whether your business has something relevant to contribute.

It's also helpful to understand what different media need.

Television needs visuals and action. Radio and podcasts need interesting voices and sounds. At Travel & Words, we discussed how the rhythm of rice pounding at Mochi Tsuki could bring an audio story to life. Print and digital journalists need compelling details, reliable sources and good photographs.

Before pitching, research what the journalist actually covers. A writer interested in cycling will have different needs than someone covering food or cultural history. Keep your email brief, explain why the story is relevant now and make it easy to arrange interviews or obtain photographs.

And share your ideas with your local tourism organization. We regularly work with journalists looking for interesting stories and can help connect businesses with media opportunities.

Here's a small challenge: Think of one thing about your business that visitors find surprising. Write it down, along with who could help tell that story. A great story can sit unnoticed for years, but an anniversary, an emerging trend or something happening in the news can suddenly make it relevant.

You might have the beginning of your next media pitch. ■



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Senior Wellness

Minds, Mission, and Memory Care



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

The landscape of the senior living industry is undergoing a profound shift, driven largely by the escalating global crisis of cognitive decline. As millions of families navigate the complexities of progressive memory loss, the industry has had to transform from a model of basic hospitality and assistance to one of highly specialized clinical and emotional support.

Standing at the forefront of this evolution is a multitude of nonprofit organizations dedicated specifically to Alzheimer's and dementia care. These nonprofits serve as the connective tissue between medical research, senior living providers, and the families who need answers.

Mapping the Nonprofit Ecosystem

The ecosystem of nonprofits supporting the memory care sector is vast, ranging from massive international research engines to highly localized advocacy groups. Each plays a distinct role in shifting how senior living communities approach cognitive impairment.



- The Alzheimer's Association: As the largest nonprofit funder of Alzheimer's research, this organization sets the gold standard for care guidelines. They provide senior living operators with evidence-based training programs, ensuring that frontline caregivers are well-versed in person-centered care methods rather than outdated clinical practices.

- The Dementia Society of America: Focused heavily on immediate education and resources, this nonprofit emphasizes non-medical interventions. They champion the integration of music, art, and touch therapies within senior living environments to improve daily resident engagement.

- The Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA): The AFA focuses intensely on raising the quality of care. They offer a specialized "Excellence in Care" distinction for senior living communities that meet rigorous standards in staff training, physical environment safety, and therapeutic programming.

Transforming Senior Living Environments

The collaboration between these distinct nonprofits and senior living communities has entirely redesigned the modern memory care neighborhood. Historically, dementia care in institutional settings relied heavily on physical or chemical restraints to manage behavioral expressions.

Today, informed by nonprofit advocacy, the industry utilizes environmental design and behavioral psychology.

Nonprofit-led research has guided communities to implement architectural features that reduce anxiety and confusion. This includes circular hallways that prevent residents from reaching frustrating dead ends, distinct color-coding to aid in navigation, and specialized circadian lighting systems that mitigate the effects of "sundowning".

Furthermore, nonprofits have helped reframe how caregivers view dementia symptoms. Instead of viewing confusion or agitation as behaviors to be managed, staff are trained to see them as communication. This paradigm shift – pioneered and funded by nonprofit educational initiatives – allows senior living teams to identify underlying needs, such as physical pain or environmental overstimulation, rather than resorting to unnecessary medication.

Supporting the Caregiving Infrastructure

One of the most critical, yet frequently overlooked, contributions of these nonprofits is their support for the caregiving workforce. The senior living industry faces chronic labor shortages, particularly in high-stress memory care units.

Nonprofits step into this gap by providing free counseling, support groups, and continuing education for professional caregivers. By addressing burnout and providing staff with practical tools to handle complex cognitive behaviors, these organizations directly improve workforce stability. When employee turnover decreases, consistency of care increases – a factor that is absolutely vital for dementia patients who rely heavily on familiar faces and predictable routines.

A Unified Path Forward

The relationship between the senior living sector and the specialized nonprofit community is entirely symbiotic. Senior living providers offer the physical infrastructure and daily operational execution, while nonprofits inject the necessary funding, cutting-edge research, and public advocacy.

As the prevalence of Alzheimer's and related dementias continues to climb, this partnership will remain the driving force behind industry innovation. By working hand-in-hand, these sectors ensure that a diagnosis of cognitive decline is met not with isolation, but with a community designed to honor a senior's enduring dignity. ■


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Give People a Reason to Choose You

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

Put your hand over the logo on your last advertisement.

Could it belong to another business in your industry?

If the answer is yes, you may have an opportunity to make your marketing work harder.

Last month, I wrote about community involvement and its role in building familiarity and trust. People need to know who you are.

But once they recognize your name, does your marketing help them understand why they should choose you?



Start With What Matters to Your Customer

Business owners know their products and services inside and out. Our customers may have a different set of questions.

Will you return my call? Can you help me choose? Will I understand the estimate? What happens if something goes wrong?

Those questions deserve a place in your marketing.

A contractor might focus on craftsmanship, but a homeowner may also want to know what to expect while work takes place in their home. A retailer might promote new inventory, while a customer wants help finding a gift that feels personal.

The product or service matters. So does the experience of buying it.

Make Your Promises Specific

"Quality products."

"Great customer service."

"Experienced professionals."

Most businesses would say the same things. What does great service look like at yours?

Do you explain the options? Provide a written estimate? Keep customers informed when a schedule changes?

Tell people.

You don't need to offer something no other business has ever offered. You need to clearly explain what customers can expect and make sure your team delivers.

Listen to the People Who Already Choose You

Read your reviews. Look at the thank you emails. Ask your staff what customers mention most often.

You may think people choose you because of your selection. They may tell you it's because someone explained the options without making them feel rushed.

Ask a few customers: "What made you decide to work with us?"

Their answers can help you write an ad, improve your website or identify a strength you haven't talked about enough.

Show People What You Mean

A photograph of completed work gives people something to evaluate. A customer story helps them picture their own experience.

Answer practical questions, too. What happens during the first appointment? How far ahead should they book? Can they start with a smaller project?

Useful information helps people feel ready to act.

Give Each Ad a Job

There is a temptation to put everything into an advertisement. Every service. Every credential. Every reason someone might need you.

When everything competes for attention, the most useful message can get lost.

Decide what you want the ad to accomplish. Promote one service. Answer one question. Give someone a reason to visit.

Then make the next step clear.

"Call to schedule a showroom visit" gives customers more direction than "Contact us."

If your ad promotes a particular service, link to a page where people can easily find it. Don't make an interested customer start the search over.

Take a Fresh Look

Review one ad and the page it sends people to. Can a new customer understand what you offer, why it matters and what to do next?

Ask someone outside your business to look. What feels obvious to you may be missing from the message.

Start with one vague claim. Replace it with a specific promise you can keep. Add an example and a clear next step.

Community involvement helps people get to know your business. Your marketing should help them understand what it will be like to become your customer.

Give them a reason to choose you. Then give them an experience that reinforces that choice. ■

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





West Sound Wildlife Shelter Executive Director Lisa Horn, right, and wildlife rehabilitation technician Sawyer Kibler stand outside the Bainbridge Island facility, which treats injured and orphaned wildlife. ***Photo courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio***

A hospital for the wild – and a community that keeps it going

At West Sound Wildlife Shelter on Bainbridge Island, rehabilitation means more than treating injured animals. It requires skilled care, a network of volunteers and donors, and patience with both wildlife and the people trying to help it.

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

The nursery at West Sound Wildlife Shelter is quiet by late summer. During the busiest weeks, nearly every surface can hold enclosures for baby birds, squirrels and opossums, Executive Director Lisa Horn said. On this visit, the room holds only a few patients – the last of the season's young arrivals.

The building itself reflects the challenges of the work. One section was built in 1921 as an office for the Bloedel estate; another dates to 1960. Neither was designed to function as a wildlife hospital. The floors need work, the kitchen is small, and 15 freezers plugged in around the property store food for the animals.

"We've just made it work since we started," Horn said.

Making it work requires veterinary care, practical improvisation and a commitment to public service. West Sound Wildlife Shelter treats injured and orphaned wildlife from Bainbridge Island and across the Kitsap Peninsula, while working with other rehabilitation organizations to help animals from farther afield. Some patients need treatment and a brief recovery. Others require weeks of care and conditioning before they can return to the wild. A small number cannot be released.

The work often begins before an animal arrives. The shelter fields about 7,000 calls a year, Horn said, with questions surging during the summer. People call about birds on the ground, rabbit nests

in their yards or animals that appear injured. Sometimes, the best first step is not a trip to the shelter but a conversation with someone who can help determine whether an animal needs intervention.

"Call first," wildlife care technician Sawyer Kibler said.

Baby birds and rabbits can appear abandoned when they are not. Staff can explain how to determine whether a parent is returning or how to respond without unnecessarily disturbing the animal.

That advice can spare wildlife additional stress while helping a small staff manage a steady stream of patients.

"A lot of the time, if we just leave them, the mom will come back," Kibler said, "we have lots of different techniques" for checking whether young animals need help.

Care that prepares an animal to leave

Once an animal is admitted, treatment is only one part of rehabilitation. The goal is to help patients recover the strength and skills they need to survive independently.

Inside the shelter, birds receive examinations and treatment much as they would in a veterinary clinic, with care tailored to each species. For some procedures, staff use hoods that provide darkness and gentle pressure to help birds settle during examinations. Patients may also receive medication to reduce stress.

The shelter has digital X-ray equipment, and a veterinarian who has worked with the organization for 15 years consults remotely on images, diagnoses and treatment plans.

As patients recover, they move from the indoor hospital to outdoor enclosures, where they can rebuild strength and practice natural behaviors. A flight-training area built in 2009 can be divided into five sections, allowing staff to adjust the space for different birds and stages of recovery.

One young bald eagle arrived after being found grounded at a state park, emaciated and struggling. Staff provided regular feedings and fluids before moving the eagle through a series of smaller enclosures. Eventually, it was introduced to another young eagle. The birds spent time together, which Kibler said can help young eagles learn from one another.

Now, the eagle is building confidence. Sisal rope wrapped around perches creates a kind of staircase, making it easier to climb to a higher perch and practice short flights.

Another raptor, an owl, arrived with a serious fracture to a wing bone after a suspected vehicle strike. Staff stabilized the injury and are monitoring the healing process before deciding when the bird is ready for more flight practice. For raptors,



Wildlife care technician Sawyer Kibler holds Rocky, a resident rock pigeon that cannot be released because suspected neurological damage affects her ability to fly.



Staff at West Sound Wildlife Shelter carefully measure food to ensure each animal receives the appropriate diet and nutrition during rehabilitation.



A young owl receives care at West Sound Wildlife Shelter. The owl will be cared for until it can be released back into the wild.





Photos courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

rehabilitation involves more than getting airborne; birds may also need to practice turns and other maneuvers required for hunting and navigating their surroundings.

Food is another part of that preparation. Patients receive varied diets, and staff try to give them opportunities to recognize and handle foods they may encounter in the wild.

Donated salmon from the Quilcene National Fish Hatchery is a major resource. Horn estimates that the shelter received about 7,000 pounds this year, valued at roughly $100,000. The shelter also distributes salmon to other wildlife organizations that need it.

The donation is essential to feeding the injured birds in the shelter's care.

The outdoor enclosures accommodate temporary patients as well as permanent residents. Two pigeons, Rocky and Cyclops, live indoors and participate in the shelter's education program.

Rocky, a rock pigeon, cannot be released because suspected neurological damage affects her flight. Cyclops, a band-tailed pigeon, is fully flighted but requires regular care for a missing eye.

Mariah, a red-tailed hawk, is another permanent resident. She came to the shelter after the facility where she had been an education bird closed.

These animals help staff teach the public about local wildlife and the realities of rehabilitation. In a busy year, the shelter reaches about 15,000 children, often by bringing education animals to schools and community groups.

Kibler said a common misconception is that every injured animal that cannot be released can be placed in a permanent home. In reality, such placements are rare. An animal must be physically able to live in captivity, behaviorally suited to it and matched with a facility that can commit to its needs for years.

For patients, there are three possible outcomes: release into the wild, placement in permanent care when appropriate, or humane euthanasia.

Horn said people can understandably struggle with the last option, particularly after investing time and emotion in rescuing an animal. But when treatment cannot give an animal a viable life, euthanasia can prevent it from dying slowly from injury, starvation or exposure.

"It's almost always a success," Horn said, when euthanasia means an animal did not have to suffer alone in the wild.

An operation built on volunteers and donations

Behind every patient is a long list of daily responsibilities: preparing species-specific diets, administering medication, cleaning enclosures, tracking recovery and finding ways to keep animals engaged without allowing them to become too accustomed to people.

For young animals, limiting unnecessary human contact is especially important. A wild animal that learns to depend on people may have a harder time surviving after release.

Care also extends beyond the enclosures. Volunteers repair structures, prepare food and transport animals to release sites. One volunteer might drive several hours round trip to return a bird to suitable habitat.



West Sound Wildlife Shelter on Bainbridge Island provides care for injured and orphaned wildlife, relying on staff, volunteers and community donations to sustain its work.



A young bald eagle practices climbing and short flights at West Sound Wildlife Shelter as it builds strength and confidence during rehabilitation.



The shelter is equipped with an x-ray machine.



Onyx, a resident crow at West Sound Wildlife Shelter, is among the animals that help the organization educate the public about local wildlife.



A great horned owl at West Sound Wildlife Shelter, where rehabilitation helps injured birds regain the strength and skills they need to survive in the wild.



Rocky, a resident rock pigeon at West Sound Wildlife Shelter, serves as an education animal after neurological issues left her unable to fly well enough for release.

About 60 volunteers support the shelter, and Kibler estimated that they carry out roughly 95% of its operations. Four staff members work in the hospital, with eight staff members at the organization overall.

"We could not do this without volunteers," Kibler said.

Community support sustains the shelter financially, too. Horn said the organization relies almost entirely on private donations, supplemented by grants and foundation support. Its annual auction is a major fundraiser, accounting for about one-third of the operating budget, she said.

When the pandemic disrupted in-person events, the organization looked for a more sustainable source of revenue. That effort led to Wild Bird Mercantile, a resale shop operating in space provided by Rolling Bay Presbyterian Church.

The shelter rents the space at a modest cost, and the shop has raised nearly $100,000 for wildlife care. Community members also donate food, produce, towels, linens and other supplies.

The shelter's needs can be specific, but Kibler said people who are unsure what to contribute can consult the organization's online wish list or ask staff for guidance.

The need for that support is closely tied to the pressures wildlife face. Horn and Kibler pointed to development and human encroachment as ongoing challenges. Outdoor cats are another frequent source of injury, Kibler said, with many young birds and mammals arriving after being caught by cats.

The issue is complicated, he said, because hunting is a natural behavior for cats, even as it can have devastating consequences for wildlife.

The shelter also fills a role that members of the public might expect government agencies to provide. Fish and wildlife officers cover large areas, Horn said, and there are not enough of them to respond to every animal in need.

West Sound is a small organization, not a field-response force. Staff members go out when they can, but much of the operation depends on members of the public bringing animals to the shelter.

That limitation makes partnerships especially important. In addition to its relationship with the fish hatchery, the shelter works with other rehabilitation groups and veterinarians. It takes in animals that larger centers may not be equipped to handle, including waterfowl and some common local species.

For baby otters and beavers, the shelter can provide initial care before transferring them to a facility with the space and resources to raise them.

A new setting for the next chapter

The shelter's most significant opportunity is a planned move to Port Gamble. Horn said the new location would give the organization space to build a hospital roughly twice the size of its current facility, along with a much larger kitchen and a walk-in freezer. It would also be the first property the organization owns.

Just as important, the new setting would give recovering animals more room and a quieter environment, Horn said. At the current site, the flight area sits beside a parking lot and other public activity. The planned move would offer a more natural setting for patients to regain strength before release.

For now, staff members continue adapting the old buildings and making the most of the space available. The work is demanding and can be difficult, but Horn described the shelter as a place that cares for people as well as animals.

Some callers arrive frightened or worried about an animal they have found. Some volunteers come looking for a sense of purpose or a refuge of their own.

The same community that brings injured wildlife to the shelter helps sustain it through time, supplies, transportation and donations.

"This hospital – it belongs to this community," Horn said.

That support allows a small nonprofit to keep answering the phone, caring for patients and preparing them, whenever possible, to return to the wild. ■

There Is No Mission Without Margin

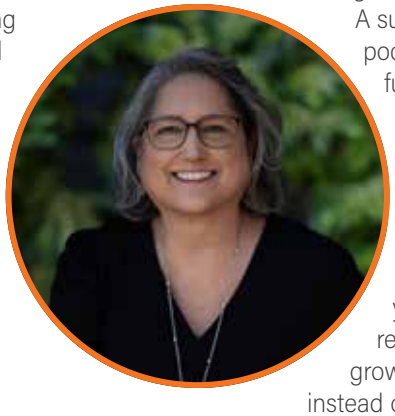


By Julie Piazza, SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights

When I relocated from Portland to San Diego, I was between HR roles and searching for my next position. A new REI store was preparing to open, and I was hired onto the team that would launch it. My plan was simple: work the sales floor until I landed my next HR role, then move on.

That isn't what happened. For the next eight years, I worked full-time as a human resources leader and part-time at REI, helping co-op members choose the right kayak, snowboard, skis, or bike for their outdoor adventures. I couldn't walk away, and one moment from the very beginning helps explain why.

The night before opening day, then-CEO Sally Jewell came down from Seattle to meet our team. She spoke about the co-op, its members, and its purpose. Then she said something that has stayed with me ever since: "There is no mission without margin."



Where the Idea Comes From

The phrase has deep roots in the nonprofit world. "No margin, no mission" is widely credited to Sister Irene Kraus, who led the Daughters of Charity National Health System and later became the first woman to chair the American Hospital Association. I don't remember whether Sally referenced her that night, but the idea traveled well: from a Catholic health system, to an outdoor co-op, to a brand-new store in San Diego, and now to every nonprofit leader reading this article.

REI is a member-owned co-op, not a nonprofit. Still, that evening helped me understand something every mission-driven organization needs to hear. The mission is big and important, and we must be able to sustain it.

What Margin Really Means

In plain terms, margin is what remains after you've covered the full cost of doing the work. For a nonprofit, it means generating a surplus: revenue left over once programs, salaries, rent, technology, and operations are paid for. That surplus is the margin.

A surplus isn't profit pocketed by owners. It's fuel reinvested in the mission and a cushion that protects it. Margin is how an organization replaces a failing roof without cutting a program, weathers the year a major grant isn't renewed, and says yes to growing community needs instead of building a waitlist.

Why We Avoid the Conversation

Many mission-driven leaders feel uneasy talking about money. It can seem at odds with the purpose that drew them to the work. I understand that instinct. But REI taught me that the fundamentals of business don't compete with the mission. They serve it. Efficient practices, diverse revenue streams, and a clear strategic plan determine how far, and how long, a mission can reach.

A Strong Foundation for Lasting Impact

Consider a familiar pattern. A nonprofit launches a program the community loves. Demand grows, and the team says yes to more clients, more sites, more services. No one wants to turn people away. But funding doesn't keep pace. Staff stretch thinner, reserves drain, and leaders eventually face the painful choice of scaling back the very program that defined them.

That isn't a failure of heart. It's a gap in planning, and it's preventable. Organizations that talk about margin early, build reserves deliberately, and grow at a pace their finances can sustain are the ones able to keep their promises today and in the future.

The People Behind the Margin

As an HR leader, I see the human side of this clearly. When margin disappears, people usually feel it first: frozen wages, unfilled positions, deferred training, and dedicated employees carrying more than any one person should. Burnout and turnover follow, taking relationships and knowledge with them. When margin is healthy, organizations can pay fairly, invest in development, and keep the experienced people who make the mission real every day.

Sally's words that night weren't about putting profit ahead of purpose. They were about protecting purpose. Margin isn't something to whisper about. It's how the mission shows up in the world, and how it reaches more of the people it was meant to serve. ■

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