



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Apr, 15, 2009

Outlook for green industries, jobs is upbeat

DAVE GALLAGHER / THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - With the fundamental changes taking place in the economy, an upcoming local business conference will look at the opportunities in one industry that is expected to see significant growth.

The Future of Business: Green Jobs and Sustainable Industries in the 21st Century will have a variety of presenters talking about opportunities for jobs and business growth as well as weathering the current economic times, said Michelle Long, executive director of Sustainable Connections. She expects more than 300 people, primarily business owners, to attend the event.

While green jobs and sustainability will be the overarching theme at the all-day conference, the presenters will come at the topic from a wide variety of industries.

David C.E. Williams, CEO of ShoreBank Pacific, will talk about sustainable community development; Rud Browne of The Ryzex Group will give advice on being a green company during challenging economic times; author and CEO Martin Melaver will discuss creating businesses that add value while inspiring change.

Green-related jobs are considered among the few areas expected to be fairly recession resistant in 2009, according to a recent study by the Washington State Employment Security Department.

While the economy is struggling, it's still an opportune time to get out a genuine message through marketing, said Michelle Barry, senior vice president of The Hartman Group, a market research organization. She believes there is a fundamental shift taking place about what consumers want, and she plans on talking about it at the conference.

"The way Americans consume is changing; more are thinking about quality rather than quantity. More consumers are questioning what's necessary," Barry said.

Changes continue to take place in the green building industry, said Jason F. McLennan, CEO of the Cascadia Region Green Building Council.

While times are tough in construction, he expects green projects to move forward, particularly as the federal government's economic stimulus package starts flowing through the economy. When private projects get going again, green building techniques will continue to gain acceptance, particularly with lenders.

"It (green building) is now seen as a value-added feature, so there is a better chance of getting funding than a few years ago," McLennan said.

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