

BUSINESS

Business to discuss role in environment

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BELLINGHAM — The discussion about business environmental practices has become a popular topic across the country in the past couple of years, and it's come as a pleasant surprise to Michelle Long.

Long, executive director at the Bellingham-based Sustainable Connections, said the acceptance among local business leaders that environmental issues need to be addressed has been a dramatic.

"I think we are reaching that 'a-ha' moment where we need to make improvements that go beyond the traditional economic model," said Long, whose 540-member organization celebrated its fifth anniversary earlier this month. "There is a much more open discussion about what should be done than when we started this organization."

The latest trends in environmental business practices will be a main topic of discussion at the organization's fourth annual Spring Business Conference and Expo. The conference will have a variety of speakers and booth vendors talking about ways to more efficiently buy and sell goods, consume energy and grow and sell food. Conference attendees also will get a chance to provide input on two prototype tools that will be used to evaluate companies.

"We want to try and evaluate what is a good, high-quality job and what businesses can do to provide them," Long said. "Wages and benefits will be looked at, but also a variety of other things that improve the quality of life of the employee and customer, such as how bike-friendly the business is. The goal is to continue to improve the quality of life in this area."

Improving the quality of life in an entire community was what Long and her husband, Derek, had in mind when they started the organization in 2002.

"There have been many socially responsible companies and groups over the years," Long said. "What's been missing is a place-based situation where a community could work together to achieve some of these goals. We think of Whatcom County as a place that is small enough where dramatic innovation can take place. Then, if successful, it can be used in other parts of the country."

MEETING DETAILS

When: 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Friday.

Where: Depot Market Square.

What it's about: The conference will have a variety of speakers focused on creating an economy with sustainable, environmentally friendly business practices. Speakers include Bill McKibben, author of "Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities & the Durable Future;" Rud Browne, founder of Bellinghambased The Ryzex Group and KC Golden, policy director for Climate Solutions.

More information: Visit www.sconnect.org.

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