

Sustainable Connections Appoints New Executive Director and Welcomes BALLE National Headquarters

BELLINGHAM, WA – August 26, 2009

Bellingham's reputation as a center for excellence in sustainable community and economic development was strengthened this month with the arrival of the national headquarters of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) and the appointment of new Executive Directors for BALLE and Sustainable Connections.

As of September 1st, Derek Long is the new Executive Director at Sustainable Connections, while former director Michelle Long takes on the role of Executive Director for BALLE.

Michelle and Derek were the first staff to BALLE in Bellingham in 2002, the same year they co-founded SC with a team of local business leaders dedicated to transforming the local economy through sustainable practices. As new start-ups, SC and BALLE shared staff and office space for the first two years, with BALLE headquarters moving to San Francisco once both organizations had grown enough to require full time administration. Derek served as SC's Program and Development Director, while Michelle served as SC Executive Director and maintained a seat on the BALLE board. Michelle's new appointment as BALLE Executive Director returns the organization's headquarters to Bellingham. To complete the staffing transition, Sustainable Connections will hire a new Program Director, while BALLE adds administrative support staff in Bellingham and maintains regional offices in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

SC Board of Directors Chair, Chris Webb, said the board welcomes the changes and sees a bright future for both organizations, "Michelle and Derek's leadership over the past eight years has been exemplary. Under their guidance, Sustainable Connections has become a national leader in sustainable business practices. Derek's experience provides us with a seamless transition as he takes over as Executive Director, and BALLE will benefit from Michelle's vision and ability."

Since their inception, both organizations have earned national recognition for their leadership in sustainability. Sustainable Connections has grown to include almost 700 local business and community members, who have led our community in achieving one of the highest national per capita rates of 'green'/energy efficient buildings, in becoming the number one EPA certified green power community in the country (Spring 2008), in fostering hundreds of new trade relationships between local buyers and farmers each year, and in becoming a community where 3 in 5 households have changed their purchasing behavior to think local *first*.

SC's programs have been so successful that other communities across the country are seeking to replicate the model in their region, with the help of SC's "How-To Kit" and business consulting services. Many of these communities have joined the BALLE network. BALLE is now the fastest growing organization of socially responsible businesses, comprising an international network of 75 community networks with 20,000 members across the US and Canada. BALLE networks create sustainable living economies through the building blocks of green building, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, zero-waste manufacturing, independent retail, and community capital.

“As Executive Director of BALLE, Michelle Long will bring the experiences gained in advancing the Bellingham model to even greater social impact, helping communities across the continent learn from what Bellingham has accomplished. We couldn’t be more excited about BALLE’s future under Michelle’s dynamic and capable leadership, and look forward to a continued learning relationship between BALLE and Sustainable Connections,” Judy Wicks, BALLE co-founder, and chair, board of directors.

The presence of both SC and BALLE headquarters in Bellingham reinforces Whatcom County’s position as a national leader in the emerging new economy. NPR Marketplace called our community the “epicenter of a new economic model,” and the National Resources Defense Council recently ranked Bellingham the #1 small city in their ‘smarter city’ award for urban progress toward sustainability.

Bellingham Mayor Dan Pike supports the creation of a sustainable local economy that will benefit citizens both now and in the future.

"Sustainable Connections and BALLE are two shining examples of why Bellingham is well poised to maintain our leadership role in developing sustainable practices and simultaneously growing green jobs. We are all fortunate that Michelle and Derek have elected to make this their home town. In addition to doing meaningful work locally; they trumpet Bellingham's strengths around the nation and the globe. I look forward to more collaborators and entrepreneurs coming to our area to join in the momentum the Longs have helped create," said Pike.

Despite their successes, both SC and BALLE note that there is still much to do, and much to share with others. Under Derek’s leadership, SC will continue the successful programs he created and will develop new initiatives to address changing social, environmental, and economic concerns. Upcoming programs will focus on energy efficiency, the viability of local agriculture, and the development of a new sustainable business certificate in partnership with Whatcom Community College. SC will continue to grow its consulting program in partnership with BALLE, which, under Michelle’s direction, plans to regionalize new network development services to be delivered by leading networks around North America.

With the development of partnerships between organizations like SC and BALLE, and the continued support of local business and industry leaders, Whatcom County is set to remain on the forefront of the sustainable economies movement.