



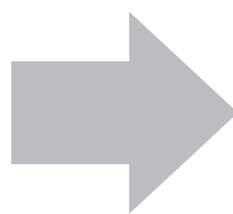
# currents

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## Sustainable Momentum

PROGRESSIVE BUSINESS  
 ALLIANCE LOCATES  
 NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS IN  
 BELLINGHAM

Derek Long moves over;  
 Michelle Long moves up



**LONG STORY** short, Derek and Michelle electrified the community when they first arrived in Bellingham in 2002. The Longs brought with them the principles of building a sustainable local economy, which they helped usher into practice through Sustainable Connections, a business alliance dedicated to local economies, green building and renewable energy standards, sustainable agriculture, zero-waste manufacturing, independent retail, and community capital.

Sustainable Connections was modeled after the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), a national support organization dedicated to help empower local businesses transform their communities by working cooperatively toward a shared vision. Sustainable Connections quickly became one of the most prominent BALLE models in the country. Now that comes full circle as BALLE returns its national headquarters to Bellingham.

Derek Long takes over as the new executive director at Sustainable Connections, while former director Michelle Long takes on the role of executive director for BALLE.

"As a community, we are taking steady, incremental steps toward sustainability that add up to big results," Derek said. "We are just starting to be recognized for this progress and being asked for help as a model for other communities. BALLE in Bellingham is the right move for providing that help. There is no more natural home for the organization."

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. As start-ups, SC and BALLE shared staff and office space for the first two years, with BALLE headquarters mov-

ing 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.

Chris Webb, who chairs the SC board, said his board sees a bright future here 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."

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 the community to achieve one of the highest national per capita rates of "green"/energy-efficient buildings, in becoming the number one federally certified green power community in the country, in fostering hundreds of new trade relationships between local buyers and farmers each year. To illustrate the penetration of the organization's influence, a survey found SC outreach programs had raised community awareness to the point where three out of five Bellingham households reported they'd changed their purchasing patterns to "buy local."

SC's programs proved so successful other com-

munities across the country began 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.

The BALLE alliance is now an international network of 75 communities with 20,000 members across the United States and Canada.

The presence of both SC and BALLE headquarters in Bellingham reinforces Whatcom County's position as a national leader in the emerging new economy, with NPR Marketplace circling area as the "epicenter of a new economic model." The National Resources Defense Council recently ranked Bellingham the #1 small city in their Smarter City award for urban progress toward sustainability.

"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," Bellingham Mayor Dan Pike said.

"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," Pike said. ☺