

Ferndale Record-Journal

Local businesses featured in national documentary



Riley Starks, owner and operator of The Willows Inn on Lummi Island, maneuvers his skiff up to the shore to pick up PBS host David Brancaccio and a documentary team who, as part of a national road trip, were exploring communities that use innovative approaches to create jobs and build economic prosperity. A one-hour film featuring Whatcom County business airs Nov. 26 at 7 p.m. on KTCS Channel 9. — Courtesy photo | Riley Starks

Megan Claflin

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Sustainable Connections to host a preview of ‘Fixing the Future’ Nov. 18

LUMMI — The crew at Lummi Island Wild (LIW) frequently welcomes chefs and restaurateurs to spend a day learning about reef netting salmon in Legoe Bay in order to gain a better understanding, and deeper respect, for the journey that takes fish from the water to consumers’ bellies. It isn’t often, however, that visitors arrive with a professional film crew.

In August of this year, as part of a national road trip exploring communities that use innovative approaches to create jobs and build economic prosperity, PBS host David Brancaccio and a documentary team traveled to Bellingham to look into the buy local, green power and business networking programs that are putting Whatcom County on the map, said Derek Long, executive director of Sustainable Connections.

“Local small businesses deserve this important national recognition for their leadership, innovation and stewardship,” Long said. “With continued effective local government and educational partnerships, as well as the support of locally vested citizens, these businesses will continue to transform our economy for the benefit of us all.”

The one-hour film features four communities across the U.S. including Austin, Texas; Portland, Maine; Fargo, North Dakota; and Bellingham/Whatcom County. At each location, Brancaccio and the PBS crew explored different industries looking for creative, proactive individuals like Riley Starks, owner and operator of The Willows Inn on Lummi Island and one of the seven members of the LIW cooperative.

“Most people today don’t know what happens from the time their food comes out of the ground, or the water, and goes into a package,” Starks said. “It’s the reason a little fishery like ours is so important in the grand scheme of things because we’re so hands-on, caring for the resource. It’s about renewing that connection.”

Aboard the boat with LIW, Brancaccio observed as fishermen pulled in net after net of wriggling, silver salmon using a technique developed by coastal Native American communities.

Quickly becoming known as the most sustainable method of fishing, having gained the support of the State Department of Fish and Wildlife and other environmental agencies,

reef netting uses significantly less fossil fuels than other commercial fishing methods because less time is spent trolling.

Lummi Island Wild took its efforts a step further and became the first solar-powered fishery in the world, which earned a Sustainable-Fisheries Leadership Award from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

An additional benefit to reef netting is that once fish are caught they are placed into a live their primary duties is limited, meaning there is still plenty of time when only one officer is on patrol, he said.

“It’s the small agencies like ours that are right at the dividing point,” Knapp said. “For the safety of the citizens and the safety of the officer, it takes 14 officers.”

Running with a small staff also presents challenges when an officer is incapacitated or absent. Recently, a Ferndale officer suffered injuries in a fight and has been unable to patrol. Knapp said he could be on light duty for several weeks.

The city recently turned down the police department’s request for new lights on police vehicles, and two staff members were laid off. After losing staff members, the department reduced its hours to Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with even more limited hours in the coming months so staff can prepare to state-required yearly reports.

“We are trying to make as many cuts as we can without affecting service,” Knapp said.

Jensen said as Ferndale grows, demand for all public services, especially police, will also grow.

— Ferndale Record