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## Bellingham's Sustainability Highlighted in PBS Documentary

by Sara Southerland

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Bellingham is featured in the PBS special "Fixing the Future," the one-hour documentary that highlights cities across America using innovative approaches to create sustainable communities, jobs and prosperity in a new economy.

Introducing the film as a mode to explore "a new way to think about money, to share, and a new way to work," PBS host David Brancaccio offers glimpses into a handful of communities with a focus on sustainable business, worker-owned cooperatives, banking and investing locally, time sharing and livability.

"This documentary highlights Bellingham as a leader in innovative and creative sustainable strategies," Mayor Dan Pike said in response to the video; "Brancaccio's team has surely discovered what Bellinghamsters have known for a long time — that we are a community that values a sustainable approach to problem solving."

The heart of the story in Whatcom County revolves around job creation as well as the work being done through Sustainable Connections to build a network of local, independently-owned businesses that support each other and in turn, support the community.

Sustainable Connections, whose core values are Thinking Local First, Healthy Environment, Strong Communities and Meaningful Employment, works to build a strong local economy by engaging local businesses to implement sustainable practices, connect them with other like-minded businesses and promote independently-owned businesses to the greater community.

### Whatcom County Landmarks

In the video, Brancaccio talks with several unique Whatcom County businesses, highlighting the sustainable fishers at Lummi Island Wild, whose solar-powered boat and reef-netting method makes them one of the most sustainable fisheries in the U.S.

Also profiled in the film is Woodstone, a Bellingham oven manufacturer whose state-of-the-art stone hearth ovens for restaurants are in use all over the world. Over the years, Woodstone has had the option to get parts made cheaply in China. Instead, owner Keith Carpenter said, the company made the decision to keep its headquarters and jobs local, investing in manufacturing technology as well as hiring 40 new employees to do the job.

Other snippets of Whatcom County in the video include the hospitable innkeepers at Willows Inn on Lummi Island; inventive 'tiny house' architect Peter Frazier; shots of Railroad Ave. and the Depot Market Square in downtown Bellingham; a talk with Mayor Dan Pike and a short interview with Michelle Long, Director of the national Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE). You will see glimpses of Boundary Bay Brewery and Mallard Ice Cream in the video as well.

Long, who founded Sustainable Connections with husband Derek in 2002 and became BALLE director in 2009, talks with Brancaccio about the importance of having an economy built on relationships and accountability.

"We want to reconnect farmers with eaters, investors with entrepreneurs, and businesses with the communities and ecosystems that they serve," Long says.

And it's happening in Whatcom County. Increasingly, Whatcom County residents are seeking out locally produced goods and services.

In an independent 2010 county-wide household survey, 86 percent of Whatcom residents said they often consider whether or not a store or restaurant is locally owned when deciding to shop there. Meantime, 92 percent said it was important to them to be able to find foods that are grown or produced by local farmers in Whatcom County, and 85 percent expressed a preference for doing business with companies that are working to save energy.

## **New Ways to Work**

The film also explores other communities that are highlighting innovation through employee-owned enterprises. Evergreen Cooperative Laundry in Cleveland, Ohio is a worker-owned cooperative that is revitalizing jobs and employing a new workforce within poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

"Worker ownership is the way of the future," David Korten, author of *Agenda for a New Economy* says to Brancaccio in the film; "It's democratizing ownership and rooting it in the community."

In Austin, Texas a group of women aim to get their worker-owned cooperative catering business, Yo Mamas, off the ground through a 16-week Cooperative Business Institute Development class.

## **New Economic Times**

Bremer Bank in Fargo, ND helps local farms and other businesses through tough times by re-investing money back into local communities.

The film closes in Portland, ME where a group of innovative folks has created a personal time bank that focuses on non-monetary goods and services. As Brancaccio learns by putting some of his own time into Hour Exchange Portland, members can provide and receive services cash free, and all hours spent are equal. Members help rebuild and sustain neighborhood networks, learn new skills and strengthen community as a result of their activities.

These inspiring projects in cities throughout America are slowly working to transform entire communities into strong economies like we have in Bellingham and Whatcom County because of community-wide "Think Local First" values.

In fact, the unemployment rate in Whatcom County at 7.7 percent is substantially below the state and national averages of 9.1 percent and 9.8 percent, respectively, according to the most recent figures available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Through business networks like BALLE and Sustainable Connections, communities across the nation are connecting with each other to share ideas and create living economies in their place, slowly creating a powerful national movement. It's happening now all around us, as people are realize that to keep our communities strong, we have to support each other. §

**For More Info:**

- PBS Fixing the Future: <http://www.pbs.org/now/fixing-the-future>.
- Sustainable Connections: <http://www.SConnect.org>
- BALLE: <http://www.livingeconomies.org>.