



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

POSTED: Wednesday, Jun. 08, 2011

Upcoming Bellingham business conference to focus on local business culture

DAVE GALLAGHER - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

This area is becoming well-known for its vibrant, locally owned business culture, and next week is an opportunity to show it off to others across the U.S.

Between Tuesday, June 14 and Friday, June 17, more than 600 business and public leaders are expected to gather in Bellingham for the ninth annual BALLE Business Conference. BALLE stands for Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, a national organization that has Whatcom County's Michelle Long as its executive director. Most of the events surrounding the conference will be hosted by the local group Sustainable Connections at Western Washington University, which is co-sponsoring the event.

The conference will include more than 80 speakers, a variety of interactive sessions, workshops and "living economy" tours. These walking tours range from a visit through downtown Bellingham to local manufacturing firms to a dairy farm.

Having a national conference of this size in Bellingham is the latest in recognitions when it comes to locally owned businesses. Earlier this year a research firm ranked this community second out of 363 U.S. metro areas for vibrancy of local, independent retailers. This area also has countless businesses that make products used not only here but are exported around the world, bringing in money to the Whatcom County economy.

Looking through this year's agenda, the conference appears to be packed with "how-to" type of workshops as well as networking opportunities. This year's theme is "Place Matters," focusing on the community's need to build local self-reliance and figure out ways to use resources to create local jobs.

Whatcom County has been quite active in the past decade providing support for locally owned businesses, whether it is through workshops, events or even marketing that lets the community know about the unique businesses that are here.

By combining that with a strong presence of out-of-the-area chains, residents here get something not every community has - choice. Shoppers can choose to visit unique, locally owned businesses if they find the customer service to be excellent; that's how we

end up with authentic businesses like a Hardware Sales or Boxx Berry Farm. Residents also can choose to go to the bigger non-local stores that might be able to offer more variety of products at lower prices.

To learn more about the conference, including the agenda and list of speakers, visit BALLE's website, livingeconomies.org. To learn more about Sustainable Connections, which is hosting the conference, visit sustainableconnections.org.

Biz Talk runs each Thursday. Reach DAVE GALLAGHER at dave.gallagher@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2269. Visit his business blog online at blogs.bellinghamherald.com/business or get updates on Twitter at twitter.com/BhamHeraldBiz.

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/06/08/2050916/upcoming-bellingham-business-conference.html#ixzz1OnmQ4fny>