

# Showcasing local economy and workforce

**T**hough it is the heart of the election season, Vancouver, Clark County and Southwest Washington will grab the attention of Olympia as well as economic and workforce development professionals from around the state – and it has little to do with the election itself. Beginning with a reception in Esther Short Park on Tuesday evening, Sept. 5, and continuing with sessions all day Wednesday, community and government professionals will meet to discuss economic and workforce development across our state.

Topics to be discussed include Linking Workforce, Education and Economic Development; Business Expansion Strategies for the Global Economy and Tax Incentives that Pave the Way for New Business Prospects. In addition, Governor Christine Gregoire will deliver the keynote address, focusing on her strategic vision for moving the state forward in the areas of economic and workforce development.

The conference Web site cites what “exciting times” these are for the economy of Washington state: adding jobs faster than the national average, exports growing for local companies, state manufacturing actually growing while other regions ship manufacturing offshore. What better time than now to “come together to develop strategies to address our economic future”? What better location than America’s Vancouver to hold that discussion?

This will mark the first statewide conference on economic and workforce development held in Vancouver, one of the state’s fastest growing regions. Elsewhere in this edition, Gerald Baugh, Economic Development officer for the City of Vancouver, calls it a “coup” for the city.

Certainly, this will mark the first visit to Vancouver for many of those attending the conference. They’ll get to see what people in our community have been working diligently to create for the better part of the last decade. One need only look to the host of projects both completed

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and under construction to know Southwest Washington should be the poster community for the state’s economic development success. The very venue of this statewide conference is the result of a strong, coordinated commitment to economic development that enhances the community, is sustainable and provides jobs for our residents.

Think about these economic and workforce development efforts that have contributed to the growing local economy just in the last two years: the retention of Nautilus' world headquarters; the opening of Columbia Tech Center to development; the SR 14/192nd interchange, allowing development of the 192nd Avenue corridor; continuing development around Esther Short Park in downtown Vancouver; Legacy Salmon Creek, the first new hospital in decades, and the expansion of Southwest Washington Medical Center; the extension of Washington State University Vancouver to a four-year university and the customized training from the Clark College Workforce Development and Continuing Education Department. These are top of mind for most of us, but don't even begin to illuminate the hundreds of individuals and companies throughout the region who are investing in companies, providing jobs and taking advantage of the workforce development programs.

Vancouver and Clark County clearly set a high standard for putting a focus on and delivering results in the economic and workforce development arena, and we think it is appropriate that the state meet here and take in what can happen when a community makes it a priority to move itself forward. If our model can help in advancing the entire state as well – all the better.