

# SILVER LININGS

## Local business hopes are worth nurturing, even in the lingering gloom of 2009

**W**ith just two days left in 2009, we couldn't pass up the opportunity to analyze some good news about the Clark County economy. Please, stop rolling your eyes and work with us on this. There really is some positive factors in the local business world. You just have to look for it.

Sometimes you have to look real hard. The top four items in "Clark County's Top 10 Business Stories of 2009," according to last Sunday's *Columbian Business* section, were not only negative in nature, they were devastating, bordering on catastrophic: The Bank of Clark County collapsed; local unemployment rose to its highest rate in 20 years; the local housing market was hit by foreclosures, weak sales and lower prices; and several longtime retail stores went out of business.

But looking at the entire list, half of the 10 stories were positive, and we'll mention here another feel-good development that wasn't even on the list. Rose City Printing & Packaging recently announced it will move its corporate headquarters from Portland to east Vancouver's Columbia Tech Center business park.

This should elicit great glee on this side of the Columbia River, first because of the company's name. The Rose City lost Rose City Printing to Vancouver for several reasons, but one was a consequence of the large number of Clark County residents — more than 60,000 — who commute to jobs in Oregon. Specifically, all three owners of the 64-year-old printing company live in Clark County, and that helped influence the decision, along with the fact that electricity rates are much lower here than in Portland. We suspect another factor was the absence of a state income tax here, and the presence of one in Oregon. That's especially aggravating to those 60,000-plus commuters from Clark County who send more than \$17 million annually

in taxes to a state in which they don't live.

Rose City Printing's \$5 million move will result in about 80 full-time employees and an estimated \$60 million in sales over the next three years. The company also will open a larger printing facility in Gresham, Ore., but the corporate headquarters and small-products printing facility will be here.

This isn't the first Portland company to recruited to this side of the river, and we hope it won't be the last. Perhaps a northward stampede of such companies will highlight all of the good economic stories that we expect for 2010.

Still, there is no denying the awful business news that ravaged countless families and businesses throughout Clark County in 2009. As they work toward recovery and seek new direction, keep these encouraging notes in mind:

The purchase by SEH America Inc. of the Hewlett-Packard campus this year keeps alive plans for nurturing one of the most valuable and powerful local business properties. Also, the local health care sector is growing, which is good news to the local economy and for patients. The Port of Vancouver's rail project is moving forward rapidly, bolstered by last week's arrival of \$2.9 million from Congress, the largest federal appropriation ever for the local port. Additionally, \$4 million in federal stimulus money was awarded to two local companies for cutting-edge energy production projects.

The long-term development of high-tech jobs is seen in the record enrollment at Washington State University Vancouver, and the expansion of facilities and programs there and at Clark College.

No doubt, 2009 was a nightmare. But every bad dream is followed by a tomorrow, and 2010 brings hope, first, for stability in the local economy, and perhaps a return to widespread prosperity in years to come. With such a diverse local economy and rapid advancements in education and job training, a robust local business climate is not beyond reach.