The Rise of the Economy

by Ted Sprague

As evidenced by our recent brush with a tornado, the winds of change in Cowlitz County are blowing.

The staff of the Cowlitz Economic Development Council (CEDC) took an opportunity Thursday evening, October 23, to have dinner with the Woodland Quality Community Coalition to describe who we are and what we do. The idea behind the meeting was to coordinate planning so we are not duplicating efforts, but complementing and enhancing them. This fun and informal meeting is just the type of gathering that other communities participate in as well and they do an excellent job of advancing the mission and vision of community leaders. The growth that is taking place in the downtowns in Cowlitz County is impressive by any measure. New businesses are moving in, beautification and quality is on the rise and there is a general sense of community pride growing from Woodland to Castle Rock and all points in between.

Not only is the commercial sector of downtowns on the rise, the new investments at the Three Rivers Mall, the Kelso interchange and other areas of the County show we are finally recovering from one of the deepest recessions in our nation’s history. Our unemployment rate, which is typically higher than state average, is down to 7%. Admittedly, many eligible in the workforce have dropped out, but jobs are being created and filled and workers are re-entering the workforce. If the two largest projects looking to locate at the Port of Kalama (NW Innovations) and Port of Longview (Haven Energy) come to fruition, I would say we may even be looking at a shortage in the workforce. The two projects alone will require more than 1,200 construction workers for over three years. What a nice problem we would have…

Every respected economist who addressed the recession back in 2009/2010 said it would take four to six years to recover. To this point they have been correct. We are now seeing evidence that the recovery is full steam ahead and it will lead to further diversification of our economy and better days for our tax base, working families and companies.
Tour the Port of Kalama’s New Interpretive Center and Offices at Open House November 6.

by Joelle Wilson

The Port of Kalama will be celebrating Kalama’s place in Pacific Northwest history as it welcomes the public to tour its newly completed Administrative Office and Interpretive Center on Thursday, November 6 at 4 p.m.

Snacks, music and tours will run from 4 to 6 p.m., with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 4:15.

The building was created with aspects of many of the original buildings on the waterfront, including the Doty Fish Company, Blue Ribbon Shingle Mill and Mountain Timber Company. The cupola on top of the building serves as a skylight and was modeled after the Tacoma Railroad FerryBridge.

The administrative offices for the Port form the perimeter of three sides of the building, with the large area in front serving as an interpretive center. The center showcases the history of Kalama and the Port, focusing on the ways transportation, from the cedar canoes of Native Americans to Ezra Meeker’s covered wagon, to modern trains and ships have affected the development of the area.

The Port had outgrown its former building, said Port Director Mark Wilson, with two employees using a file office and conference room to work from. Conferences with potential clients were frequently held in cramped offices or even the lobby.

Wilson said the new building was created to be functional but also attractive. As the Port moves forward in creating a commercial business park on its East Port property, the new building should stand as an example to the type of quality development they plan to create, he said.

The building will be dedicated to the memory of former Port of Kalama Commissioner Jim Lucas, who passed away a couple of years ago. He was instrumental in getting the project started and many of the historic design elements can be credited to him.
**Castle Rock Blooms Receive National Awards**

by Joelle Wilson

America in Bloom presented Castle Rock Bloom Team Leader, Nancy Chennault with its Community Champion Award at its national symposium held recently in Philadelphia. The city also earned the Best Hanging Baskets/Containers Award and received Special Recognition for Floral Displays. Its Jackson Hole storm water retention pond renovation also received a Special Mention.

“These awards are confirmation that Castle Rock is on the right track,” Chennault said. “It is rewarding for the city to be recognized on the national stage for the accomplishments of so many people including volunteers, Castle Rock High School students and instructors, city leaders, staff and the public works department - everyone who works so hard because they care so much and want to see Castle Rock grow.”

Chennault said she is humbled that the America in Bloom judges thought enough of her efforts to give her the Community Champion Award, “however, I believe that in the true spirit of the award, the emphasis is on community. I am grateful for the attention the award has brought Castle Rock and the Castle Rock America in Bloom program and the ‘Bloom Team’ volunteers that work so hard year round. This award is really theirs and I am proud to share it with them.”

Chennault said the value of the symposium was so much more than just the awards received. Her team was able to network with volunteers and community leaders from all over the country, sharing what has worked and not worked for them, attend activities and listen to inspiring speakers. In addition, the detailed evaluation they received from the judges who visited Castle Rock in July has provided them with tools for success on many levels,” Chennault said.

She said one of the America in Bloom Judges, Jack Clasen, said something that stands out for her, and she plans to repeat it often, “Yes, the America in Bloom program is a competition. In fact, it is highly competitive. However, a city is not competing so much against other cities for recognition and awards, a city is competing against its own potential. How far can you grow?”

**The Lending Network Hires Susan Hoosier as Director**

The Lending Network, a Certified Community Development Financial Institution located in Chehalis, has named Susan Hoosier its new Executive Director.

Hoosier most recently worked as a Commercial Loan Officer with Red Canoe Credit Union and as Director of the Small Business Development Center in Longview.

She said The Lending Network serves businesses in Cowlitz, Lewis and Thurston Counties and was established to lend money to businesses that might not otherwise have the ability to finance a project, or that need more flexible terms to make a business project financially sound. The funding is provided through federal, state and local partnerships.

The goal of The Lending Network is to help diversify employment and help create and maintain family wage jobs in the local area. In the last eight years, it has approved over 40 loans for a total of over $4.6 million. Included in those loans are 14 start-ups companies and 30 manufacturing firms.

Loan amounts of $25,000 to $250,000 are considered. The Lending Network generally targets 20% to 50% of the total financing needs. Applicants must have a sound business plan, a good credit history, experience and management capacity and the willingness to invest collateral in the project. Priority is given to companies which will employ low to moderate income people in family wage jobs, export products or services and are located in small communities.

For more information, Hoosier can be contacted at The Lending Network by calling 360-740-6960.
Haven Energy Marine Terminal Project at Port of Longview is Moving Forward

by Joelle Wilson

We are partnering with the Port of Longview to create jobs, invest in safety and provide a clean and environmentally friendly energy resource,” Greg Bowles, President of Haven Energy, said at a presentation given to the CEDC Board of Directors last week.

“This is an exciting project for us and what we’re seeing is that it is an exciting project for the community that will provide many benefits. We are excited to get it underway.” Bowles said of the $300 million construction project that would bring hundreds of family wage jobs to the local area.

Haven Energy would collect propane and butane from the Bakken oil field in North Dakota, resources which are currently burned off or flared instead of put to use. The propane and butane would be transported over land in pressurized rail cars, then refrigerated, stored and loaded onto ships at the Port. Bowles said the company essentially would be transferring the gases from one place to another. As the product came in by rail, pressure would keep it in liquid form. Haven would change that variable to temperature as the way it is kept liquid. The product would be used as a clean-burning fuel source for vehicles, cooking and heating. It is used by farmers for weed control and is a common feedstock in the manufacturing of plastics.

Haven Energy’s investment at the Port would create construction jobs for 18 to 24 months, with total pay and benefits over $135 million, and generate approximately $17 million in state and local tax revenue during the project’s construction period.

Once the project is operational, Haven Energy expects to create between 25 and 35 permanent jobs at the site, at above average wages, and pay more than $80 million in property taxes during its first 20 years of operation. Bowles said about 100 ancillary jobs would also be created.

In addition to creating jobs and promoting cleaner burning fuels Haven Energy would boast safety features that set it apart from similar facilities currently in operation throughout the country. “Our number one priority is safety,” Bowles said, touting its state-of-the-art full containment storage tanks. “The Haven Energy export terminal would have the most comprehensive safety and environmental protections of any propane and butane export facility in our nation.”

Bowles said the best way to support the project is to learn about it, talk about it and attend public meetings which will occur during the permitting process.