

# THE ECONOMIC REPORT

A SUPPLEMENT OF *The Chronicle*

## LEDC Post COVID Economic Summit Set for May 6

BY THE LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The Lewis Economic Development Council's Post COVID Economic Summit is set for Thursday, May 6.

The summit features four hours of panels composed of state and local leaders offering tips for businesses emerging from the end of the pandemic.

- Topics include:
- Supply chain disruptions
  - Hiring guidance and resources
  - How to reopen once COVID restrictions are lifted
  - How to thrive during the predicted coming Lewis County rural Economic boom

The Summit is sponsored by The Benaroya Company, The Chronicle, KELA/KMNT, Tin Men Supply and the Jester Auto Museum & Event Center.

Master of ceremonies is Brian Bonlender, the Washington State Department of Commerce director from 2013 through 2019, where he directed a \$1.6 billion budget with 300 employees and led efforts to increase housing affordability via encouraging and strengthening international trade relations for the state

The Summit is from 1 to 5 p.m. Thursday, May 6 at the Jester Auto

Museum & Event Center, 321 Hamilton Road in Chehalis. An entrance fee of \$150 will be charged for nonmembers of the Lewis Economic Development Council. Members get in free. Seating is limited to 150 people.

To sign up for the Summit contact LEDC Office Manager Marrienne Schumacher at 360.748.0114 or email her at marrienne@lewisledc.com.



**BRIAN BONLENDER**  
Former Washington  
Commerce Director

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

### Efforts Toward Unity Highlight LEDC Focus

BY RICHARD DEBOLT  
LEDC Executive Director

First, I am extremely excited to be the new Executive Director of the Lewis Economic Development Council, where we are ultra-focused on developing jobs and helping boost the local economy.

I'm honored and floored for the opportunity to help find good paying jobs for Lewis County.

My first tangible effort is the upcoming LEDC Post COVID Economic Summit set for Thursday, May 6 at the Jester Auto Museum & Event Center in Chehalis. The Summit will bring local and state leaders in to discuss tips and forecasts for businesses emerging from the end of the pandemic. See the story on the Summit and how to sign up in this issue of The Economic Report.

Also in this report is an update on the extension on the Paycheck Protection Program to May 31. This federal program helps businesses secure forgivable loans of under \$150,000. If you are struggling, specifically from impacts from the virus, please log on to the Washington State Small Business Recovery Working Group's website for assistance in applying for these funds.

The Report also delves into the emerging boom hitting East Lewis County's far-end community of Packwood. The town is "on fire" with a first-ever water and sewer system on its way and housing prices setting record highs. Perhaps a distinguished brewpub is in the works for the East Lewis County Public Development Authority's vacant property up for lease.

One aspect I will focus on in the coming months is the upcoming booming business environment sweeping its way to Lewis County. We will be growing, but we need to grow right. We need to focus on bringing in businesses with family-wage jobs, and also creating the needed infrastructure to facilitate companies that want to locate and relocate into Lewis County.

I have been meeting with business leaders and decision makers these past few months in my new role with the LEDC, and find a vibrant, inviting attitude for economic success. We need to help both existing businesses and also provide solid reasons for those businesses looking to relocate from the overloaded urban areas of the state.

One of my main goals is to build consensus, to promote unity among the various stakeholders of Lewis County, from the county to the cities to the ports to the various help agencies that do so much for our corner of the state. For too long Lewis County has found itself divided in its efforts to promote economic success. This focus on unity and coming together in a

■ SEE DIRECTOR, PAGE B3



**RICHARD DEBOLT**  
LEDC Executive  
Director

## Packwood Is 'On Fire'

*Hot Housing Market, COVID-Inspired New Neighbors and an \$8.05 Million Proposed Water and Sewer System Has Far East Lewis County Community Poised for Growth. And Then There's the Possible Award-Winning Brewpub.*

BY THE LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The bucolic community of Packwood, known as a way station for those traveling to the White Pass Ski Resort, or to take in some glorious hiking, hunting and fishing opportunities, or simply to view a herd of massive elk lollygagging in the downtown area, is "on fire."

The housing market has exploded as urban dwellers discover the beauty of this rural setting, making multiple offers on homes and building lots (often above price and all cash), primarily to use as second homes, retirement homes or a bit of both with Airbnb thrown in.

COVID has taught urban workers they no longer are tied to their offices, but can work remotely from home. No longer are they leashed to a metropolis downtown core with its accompanying crime, crazy traffic and high cost of living.

With the influx of new neighbors and energy, Packwood is poised for growth, from a possible highly praised brewpub at the East Lewis County Public Development Authority's property in the downtown core to new development coming from a water and sewer system being funded via the state Legislature this session.



Lewis County Commissioner Gary Stamper, second from right, discusses the potential of locating a brewpub and taphouse in the East Lewis County Public Authority District's warehouse space up for lease in Packwood. At left is Lewis Economic Development Council Executive Director Richard DeBolt.

### WATER AND SEWER NEEDS

The water and sewer project is years in the making. 20th District Rep. Peter Abbarno, R-Centralia, the assistant ranking Republican on the House Capital Budget Committee, helped secure

\$8.05 million to build a water and sewer system for Packwood this session. He is currently ushering the project through the legislative process.

■ SEE PACKWOOD, PAGE B3

## Paycheck Protection Program Extended to May 31

BY THE LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

On March 25, Congress extended the Paycheck Protection Program deadline until May 31, giving eligible businesses and nonprofits extra time to submit applications and work with lenders to secure this critical aid.

"Small businesses are the backbone of Washington's economy and many have been devastated during the pandemic," stated a press release from the Washington State Small Business Recovery Working Group. "Many have closed, others are barely hanging on. Small businesses owned by people of color have been particularly impacted." Congress has passed several aid

packages and the state of Washington has provided relief, along with many local communities. But resources can be difficult to find, and the applications can be challenging to navigate, the release stated.

On the website [www.smallbizhelpwa.com](http://www.smallbizhelpwa.com) you'll find answers to frequently asked questions, information on how to find individual technical assistance, how to find a lender, training opportunities and where to find more detailed program information.

"Our goal is to help as many Washington small businesses and nonprofits as possible access the help they need," the release stated.

Forgivable PPP loans proceeds will

### If You Need PPP Help:

[www.smallbizhelpwa.com](http://www.smallbizhelpwa.com)

be able to be used to cover additional expenses, including those associated with operations, property damage costs, supplier costs and worker protection expenses.

Also, the Program's eligibility is expanded to include 501(c)(6) nonprofit organizations, housing cooperatives and direct marketing organizations, among other types of organizations. In addition, Congress enacted better tax treatment for PPP and made the loan forgiveness process easier for loans under \$150,000.

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## BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT — STUART CAVNESS

## BUSINESS: THE CAVNESS GROUP

STUART CAVNESS  
The Cavness Group

**Q: How long have you been a member of the Lewis Economic Development Council?**

**A:** I've been a member for four short years.

**Q: Why did you join LEDC?**

**A:** The LEDC is full of community and business leaders that take an active approach to the growth of Lewis County; people that aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and make positive growth for our beautiful county. I couldn't wait to get in the same room as those individuals and learn from them. It's one of the best decisions I've made.

**Q: Why do you support the LEDC?**

**A:** I believe in Lewis County. Plain and simple. I love the county that I grew up in, and what the future is looking like for the next generation.

**Q: What are your favorite programs performed by the LEDC?**

**A:** The small business expansion and outreach has to be the most fulfilling for me. Large corporations get a lot of glory when they choose our community, but I personally love seeing and hearing about a business expanding and choosing to stay in Lewis County. Just today I heard about a company needing

a larger commercial space, and it wasn't even a question of if they were going to stay in our community but where they could move to.

**Q: Why should someone join the EDC?**

**A:** A tide lifts all ships. That is correct even in a county that doesn't touch salt water! Our commitment to recruiting new companies, retaining the unique talent in our county and helping expand existing businesses means that when one of us succeeds, we all succeed. I can't think of a more cohesive organization that operates in everyone's best interests.

**Q: What is a key for the success of your business?**

**A:** Putting your client first. Every time. Plain and simple. I've found that being honest with people about what things cost will only bring more business. Don't try to hide anything.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about volunteering?**

**A:** I've enjoyed being able to use the skills and knowledge I've gained being self-employed for the last decade to actually help grow and sustain the very county that raised me.

**Q: What do you love most about the**

**financial planning industry?**

**A:** I enjoy people. Everyone has a unique story. Everyone has a unique direction. Being able to help people save and build for differing goals through their life is one of the most fulfilling ways I could envision a career.

**Q: How do you define success?**

**A:** The ability to make a meaningful and measurable difference in the world around me.

**Q: Who inspires you?**

**A:** Vocationally? Warren Buffett and Jim O'Shaughnessy. Avocational, Trevor Robertson of Iron Bark fame and the late Larry Pardey.

**Q: If you could choose anyone as a mentor, who would you choose?**

**A:** I've been fortunate in life to seek out advice from anyone who I feel has something to teach me. I've found that nearly everyone wants to share what they know, if asked. If I find someone who I want to learn from, I'll usually offer to buy them lunch or a beer.

**Q: What's the last book you read?**

**A:** "Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage." I might have gone on an arctic exploration kick over the last six months.

**Q: What's the first concert you ever attended?**

**A:** Jimmy Buffett. Promise I'm not 65.

**Q: What is your favorite meal?**

**A:** Beef Stroganoff.

**Q: What do you do for pleasure outside of running your business?**

**A:** Spending time on the water. Either fishing, crewing on a racing sailboat, or just anchored in a secret bay on my much slower but very comfortable sailboat.

**Q: What is the favorite car you have ever owned?**

**A:** It's a toss-up between a 1985 Land Cruiser or a 1969 MG BGT. Both put a smile on my face.

**Q: What is something about you (a fun fact) that not many people know?**

**A:** While I was in college, I worked as a semi-professional sailor. One delivery I was bringing a sailboat back from West Vancouver by myself and a thru hull fitting popped out of the boat. Stepping down into ankle deep water didn't make my day. But I was able to readjust and stop the boat from sinking.

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Moerke Brings Well-Rounded Experience to Centralia's Exodus Engineering

## Engineering Firm Focuses on Both Residential and Commercial 'Problem Solving'

BY THE LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

As owner and president of his own business Exodus Engineering based in Centralia, Luke Moerke must like to keep busy with a long list of projects. He also oversees his family's 200-acre forestry farm in Adna and plenty of family duties.

"I like the design part, I like problem-solving," Moerke said of his professional duties.

Exodus Engineering is currently working on foundation design with the NW Sports Hub in Centralia and its 29,500-square-foot expansion, which will make The Hub the largest indoor amateur sports venue in the state.

The company, with four engineer technicians and a total of seven employees on the payroll, focuses on both residential and commercial projects. Moerke offers more than 14 years of experience.

Exodus Engineering performs light-frame residential, commercial structures, retaining walls and metal building foundations. They work with both big and

small projects, from massive commercial buildings to helping the homeowner with simple engineering design.

His residential expertise includes new construction, renovations, additions, shops, barns, hangers and site plans. His commercial side of the business includes new construction, tenant improvements and building modifications.

He performs drafting and design for both residential and commercial. For residential custom homes plans and drafting, he started that portion of his business two years ago when demand was nonstop.

"I got tired of saying 'no,'" he said.

Moerke earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Central Washington University followed by earning a license in civil engineering. Before that, he worked for the family business — Moerke & Sons Pump & Drilling — which was first started by his grandfather, then directed by his dad and mom. His dad pointed him to mechanical engineering, as there was a need for the family business to produce pumps and water system designs.

"Dad said, 'You should look into that,'" Moerke said.

After university graduation, Moerke worked for Pacific Northwest Engineering in Tacoma until 2012. He started Exodus Engineering in 2012 to be closer to his Adna roots and the family forestry farm located in the Curtis-Boistfort area.

Moerke's grandfather worked in logging, and partnered with several home-steaders in the Adna area, purchasing timber tracts along the way. Moerke's dad managed the timberland. Moerke took over the family duties overseeing the tim-



President and owner Luke Moerke of Exodus Engineering in Centralia goes over residential home plans.

ber. He took forestry stewardship classes and became certified in family forestry planning.

As far as family life, Moerke appreciates being able to work the family forestry farm in Adna with his six boys, two of whom he adopted as siblings out of Haiti.

"Working on the tree farm helps balance me," Moerke said, adding that it helps him get out from behind the desk at work.

The family rides dirt bikes and works the land together, as well as put in time hunting. He said God laid the adoption

into the hearts of Moerke and his wife. He also is planning, with a group of Christian believers to found a Reform church in the Lewis County area. It's not surprising, he chose the Biblical term "Exodus" for his business.

"We're builder friendly and reasonable, yet fulfill the building codes," he said. "We work with the builders and developers, and we can identify small changes that sometimes can save lots of money, or alternative materials or methods that can save construction time or labor."

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**PACKWOOD:***Continued From Page B1*

"I helped bring the proposal forward because infrastructure is essential for economic development and an increased quality of life," Abbarno said.

The water and sewer infrastructure, nonexistent in Packwood which relies on limited septic systems, could bring in expanded businesses and also multi-family dwellings, essential for an area lacking adequate housing numbers. If fully funded, the project likely would take up to two years for completion.

"Packwood has been applying for water and sewer funding for years," Abbarno said. "Sewer systems are one of the infrastructure projects holding back that community from fulfilling its potential. This has been discussed for many years by Packwood leaders."

**BRINGING IN A QUALITY BREWPUB**

One possible exciting development is being knocked around by development leaders across the county, from the Lewis Economic Development Council to the East Lewis County Public Development Authority (PDA) to County Commissioners.

Members from all three groups toured the PDA's 11,600-square-foot light industrial property up for lease during a recent afternoon. They met up with husband and wife team Amy Besunder and Peter Charbonnier, former Seattlites who closed up their Ballard brewpub following a downturn in the once thriving business due to COVID-virus disruptions. The brewers relocated to living full-time in Packwood in 2008 (but still kept brewing in Ballard) and have long planned to open a brewpub and taphouse in Packwood. The Packwood building would be a great fit for their plans, Besunder said.

"We are here to assist in their efforts to open up the brewpub in Packwood," said LEDC Executive Director Richard DeBolt. "There are opportunities for grants right now. We're excited about putting something like a brewpub here."

Lewis County Commissioner Gary Stamper also took part in the tour.

"It fits the environment of mountains, skiing, hiking," Stamper said of the possible brewpub. "Tourism has always been big in Packwood, and people are flocking to this community. However, nothing's going to get done if we aren't working together."

Gerry Monkman, the PDA's building manager, was also at the tour. He said his group "would be thrilled" if the brewpub came to pass. He should be.

The former Ballard brewpub operated by the husband and wife team, called Populuxe Brewing, was highly regarded before it closed at the end of 2020. In 2018, it won the prestigious Small Brewery of the Year by the Washington Beer Awards. The competition featured 1,297 beers entered by 181 Washington breweries.

"We had always talked about, envisioned bringing a high-quality brewery to this community, with living-wage jobs, with a community space for people to gather," Besunder said. "We looked around at several spaces, none looked right for us."

That changed this last summer when they spotted the PDA's space. Since initial discussions, Besunder has been flabbergasted by the support from area leaders.

"We have been offered all the assistance in the world," she said. "It is a very different attitude than you get in Seattle. The difference in support is night and day. It's amazing. The way people connect here is just so authentic."

The brewers recently visited Dick's Brewery Company in Centralia, a titan in the state's brewing industry.

"They (Dick's) make it work in a space that is very similar to the Packwood space," she said.

**HOT HOUSING MARKET**

Maree Lerchen, owner/broker of Mountain Valley Real Estate headquartered in Packwood, is the listing agent for the Packwood property that just might become a brewpub. She sees unprecedented home sales. She's



The East Lewis County Public Development Authorities Packwood property is up for lease. A potential award-winning brewpub is taking a serious look at opening at the property.

been selling homes in Packwood since 1981.

"Residential sales are extraordinary, like nothing I have ever seen," Lerchen said. "Prices have risen dramatically in the last two years. The supply is very low so things are selling very quickly, with no problems with appraisals."

She said the water and sewer project is key, and it likely will lead to multi-family buildings near the downtown core once completed. She sees, for example, businesses expanding their footprints currently limited by septic systems, and maybe even a laundromat and carwash.

She also believes much of the housing boom is fed by people fleeing from urban and suburban settings.

"Quite a few are from the Tri-Cities, Yakima, skiers and hikers, from Tacoma, Gig Harbor, Portland, Seattle and Vancouver," Lerchen said. "They don't have to live in the city to work anymore, and they don't have to pay Seattle prices."

Lee Grose, former East Lewis County Commissioner and president

of the PDA, said while Packwood still faces challenges right now in providing housing for potential employees, the economy of Packwood is looking up.

"I think the future is bright in Packwood, as are rural communities in general," Grose said.

**DIRECTOR:***Continued From Page B1*

singular direction is well underway and I appreciate all who have embraced this concept.

Finally, as LEDC Chair Ben Kostick said in last month's column, I am fortunate to have a strong staff in External Relations Manager Eric Sonnenberg and Office Manager Marianne Schumacher, who have made my transition to Executive Director both a smooth and pleasurable experience.

• *Richard DeBolt is a former longtime state House representative and current Executive Director of the Lewis Economic Development Council.*

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