

# THE ECONOMIC REPORT

A SUPPLEMENT OF *The Chronicle*

## LEDC Pilot Program Aims to Attract Big Dollars for Infrastructure Projects

*Comprehensive Interactive Project Map Aims to Build Efficiencies for Lewis County Leaders to Tap into Millions of Federal and State Dollars*

BY LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Dig once. Simple, direct and efficient. It can also lead to substantial development dollars for Lewis County under a new program initiated by the Lewis Economic Development Council's project to tap into both American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal dollars and also dollars tucked into the state Legislature's Capital Budget. ARPA was signed into law by President Joe Biden earlier this year. The stimulus package will fund \$1.9 trillion in infrastructure projects.

"We're going to do something nobody's done before," said Richard DeBolt, executive director of the Lewis County Economic Development Council.

The pilot program was unveiled earlier this month before a gathering of local elected leaders and agencies from across the state. With funding from the county and the city of Centralia, the LEDC is tasked with building and maintaining a layered map of all projects underway or planned in the county.

Lewis County and the city of Centralia backed the program, signing memorandums of understanding with the LEDC that will provide \$330,000 over the next four years to implement the pilot project. With about 700 infrastructure projects underway in Lewis County, the LEDC looks at ARPA funding of \$20 million in infrastructure, and another \$4 million in mental health projects.

Once the interactive map is complete, leaders can examine areas of concurrent development. It could be a new sewer line. It could be fiber for broadband. It could be putting in sidewalks or fish passage culverts.

Lewis County Commissioner Gary Stamper said the time is ripe for Lewis County to go after these funds.

"I'm very thankful Richard stepped in and had some ideas," Stamper said. "This is kind of a game changer, a homerun for everyone."

DeBolt understands how government funding works, spending the past two decades in the state Legislature, with many years serving as the Minority Leader of the House, and then for the past couple



Lewis Economic Development Council Executive Director Richard DeBolt, left, points to a comprehensive map that shows layers of different projects from different agencies, as Infrastructure Initiatives Program Manager Todd Chaput describes the details of the map.

years before retiring from politics as the Minority Republican House Leader on the Capital Budget Committee. DeBolt knows how to get projects placed at the top of funding lists, and how government deciders choose projects that are multi-jurisdictional and that can be completed.

By putting together the layered map, Lewis County leaders can pitch the multi-jurisdiction projects that emerge. Specifically, ARPA funds clean water, sewer, road and broadband projects.

DeBolt has hired Todd Chaput to run the program for the LEDC with the cooperation of scores of federal, state, county and city agencies. Chaput's title is Initiatives Program Manager. His primary task is getting the agencies to supply data of their projects underway or planned, and then with the help of county employees, to put together the comprehensive list of layered projects. Once complete, the LEDC and other leaders will offer the projects for funding.

"I think the map is pretty exciting and a useful tool," Chaput said. "To dig once is efficient, and will help us secure different pots of funding of ARPA money and from the state capital budget. ... If government is going to be involved, we want to make it as efficient as possible."

DeBolt believes the dollars will be

substantial for decades to come.

"The intention is that this becomes self-sufficient and becomes a tool that all of you are using all the time, and that we're 10 years ahead, always planning our growth and being able to leverage as much as we can as we move forward," DeBolt said to those gathered at the Veterans Memorial Museum for the kick off of the pilot program. "We know that if we don't do something to create infrastructure — sewer, water, broadband, roads, all these things — then our community is going to get overwhelmed. This is a great opportunity for us."

Chaput said key to securing the funding, and also to build in efficiencies, is to embrace the "dig once" philosophy, followed by intense lobbying to political deciders. Chaput said typically the funding organizations offer up 80% of the cost of a project, with the county or other entities coming up with the rest of the 20% cost.

Lewis County Commissioner Sean Swope said this project should reap benefits for the county for 10 years down the road and beyond.

"Getting government agencies to work together with a common vision is a good thing," Swope said. "This will bless the next generations."

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### LEDC Program Assists LC Businesses

The Lewis EDC is starting a Micro Lending Loan Program funded by the agency's board of directors.

The board of directors will choose businesses that apply for the funds. Loans will be short term with a length of three months. The low interest loans are capped at \$1,500 per business, and any Lewis County business is eligible. To qualify, businesses need to fill out an application available at the LEDC offices. The lending program starts Sept. 1.

"This will assist businesses that need just a little help," said LEDC Executive

Director Richard DeBolt. "For example, a restaurant starting back up after being shut down by the pandemic might need additional funds to power up, from purchasing needed food supplies to hiring back employees. This lending program can support a business until revenues start to come in."

#### LEDC Golf Tournament Set for Sept. 17

The Lewis Economic Development Council is hosting a golf tournament in the final days of summer on Friday, Sept. 17 at Riverside Golf Club in Chehalis (see poster of the event on

page 4 of The Economic Report).

Along with an announcement by the LEDC, the day of golf will help raise funds to power the newly-created micro-lending program, which assists small businesses with low interest loans during trying times such as the end of the pandemic.

The top prize for the winning team is a three-day stay at the Eastern Washington resort Suncadia.

This best-ball tournament invites teams of four to sign up. Opportunities for major sponsorship, as well as a hole-in-one sponsorship, are available. For additional information, call LEDC External Relations Manager Eric Sonnenberg at 208.206.5407 or contact him at [eric@lewisedc.com](mailto:eric@lewisedc.com).

### CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

#### LEDC Leading Efforts to Capture Federal and State Dollars

BY BEN KOSTICK

Chair of the Lewis Economic Development Council

With Lewis County coming into its own as far as economic growth, south Lewis County specifically is poised for growth as the Benaroya project is about to finish its Lowe's project and expand its development footprint that will attract hundreds, if not thousands of jobs to the Winlock area.

Key to the growth is a \$3.55 million electric substation that will allow for the Lewis County PUD to provide power to the growing community. The project will bring needed expansion of electrical utilities for the Winlock area as it is poised for significant residential and industrial growth.

The substation and transmission lines project for Winlock started in the fall of 2020 when the Lewis County Commissioners passed a grant for initial studies by the PUD.

Now the PUD is undergoing land acquisition for the substation site, as well as pursuing needed permitting thanks to the \$3.55 million in funding. A PUD official expects the project to finish the first phase of the project in about two years. Key is building flexibility into the design of the substation that will allow for growth, both residential and commercial.

The Lewis County PUD is to be commended for its foresight in supporting the Winlock substation, as well as planning for other substation upgrades throughout the county.

In a story in *The Chronicle* last week, the PUD announced it could need to place a price hike on utility bills. A consultant told the PUD commissioners that the agency is tapping into reserves that could be exhausted by 2027 without a rate increase. The consultant stated without a rate increase, the PUD will have difficulty funding upcoming capital infrastructure needs. The consultant proposed a 2% increase. This would bring an average residential bill from \$123 to \$133 by 2025.

Some believe the rate increase is not needed. I believe that is misguided. The PUD, in its 10-year strategic plan, identified \$27.4 million in substation upgrades.

The question at hand is do we approve the 2% rate increase or delay until reserves are depleted?

I believe in the importance of investing in our electrical infrastructure. The payoff will be increased economic growth which in turn will help fund an expanded tax base. For Lewis County to thrive economically, we have to evolve and support funding projects that in turn bring added commercial and residential development.

The Lewis Economic Development Council is becoming a driver for efficient, collaborative economic development.

■ SEE CHAIRMAN, PAGE B2



**BEN KOSTICK**  
Chair of the  
Lewis Economic  
Development Council

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## BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## CYNTHIA (CINDY) SORENSON

## BUSINESS: SORENSON TRANSPORT CO. INC.

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

**A:** Since March of this year.

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

**A:** I joined because I was born and raised in this community and truly care about it. I have a lot to be grateful for and I want all the residents here to have a good quality of life that they are proud of and grateful for too. Helping the LEDC bring more lucrative jobs to the area allows people the opportunity to have that. We need stable, thriving businesses to come here, stay here, and grow here for our community to have a better quality of life. Who would not want that for their community? No one wants to see their community or the people in it struggling in any way.

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

**A:** Oh there are so many. LTL refrigerated trucking is a lot of moving pieces with a lot of obstacles that are always time consuming, and costly, and mostly out of our control. This requires a very high attention to detail, a lot of detailed communication, the ability to adapt quickly to change and thinking outside of the box. We do not have anything to sell other than service so we must do what we said we are going to do even when it seems impossible because our customers do not care about the obstacles or the intention, nor should they. They want execution. They want their freight picked up and delivered on time. If you cannot do that better than most then you better be okay with charging low rates, which I am not.

I believe a key for almost every business is the constant desire to do better which requires something that most people are not comfortable with — change. If you let ego get in the way and think you are doing everything right, the way you have always done it, you are failing. The only constant is change and companies who do not adapt to new technologies, new systems, and strategies, changing customer and employee needs, etc. end up as failed companies. Look at what happened to Sears. They were once the largest retailer in the world and then they stopped innovating. Why experiment or take risks if it might fail? Self-preservation is often the biggest enemy of success. Life is about growth and progress, and it is often unkind to those that try to hang on for too long to what made them successful in the past.

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

**A:** Helping people. I have needed a lot of helping hands in my life and I am always looking for ways to pay that forward.

**Q: What do you love most about the transportation industry?**

**A:** I often think people in trucking are gluttons for punishment. We must really love a challenge.

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

**A:** “I think everyone’s success is defined differently, as it should be. We are all fighting different battles. For me personally, I define my success with one word: sobriety. Without my sobriety, I would have



CINDY SORENSON  
Sorenson  
Transport Co. Inc.

absolutely nothing else and we would not be here having this conversation. That I am sure of. People often think success means financial wealth, but I have met a lot of miserable, emotionally, and spiritually bankrupt “successful” people.

Other than sobriety I feel successful if I live life in a way I can be proud of through honesty, empathy and gratitude.

I find success in small, fun things as well. When I make a homemade pie and someone really likes it, that feels victorious and brings me an odd amount of joy for it being just a pie.

In business I can find and celebrate successes daily or weekly, not just quarterly or yearly. Walking into work Monday morning and so far, our team has delivered all the California freight appointments on time, on temperature, without any major problems or hang ups. The customers are happy, the drivers are happy — that is the pinnacle. That is a successful weekend! If we are taking good care of our employees and our customers, we feel successful. That is always the goal.

**Q: Who inspires you?**

**A:** Anyone with resilience and courage who has battled something that should have or could have killed them or destroyed them and they didn’t let it. That is inspiring and those stories should always be shared with the world. That’s also all of us really, some just prefer nobody knows it, but no one is inspired by anyone pretending life is easy and they never struggle. Also, I am inspired by my team at Sorenson Transport. We have a lot of employees who have been with us 10-, 20-, 30-plus years and are

always dedicated, honest, reliable and hard working. Truck drivers especially have a very tough job that requires sacrifice, long hours, time away from home, long wait times at docks, etc., and with the driver shortage they do not get a lot of time off. We have been fortunate enough to have a lot of great dedicated drivers who make all this possible and keep this country moving. It is because of them we stay fed, fueled, clothed, housed, entertained — everything. Those salt of the earth, honest, patriotic, hardworking types of people like truckers, ranchers, farmers, and laborers (to name a few) have always inspired me.

**Q: What’s the last book you read?**

**A:** I just got Empire of Pain about the Sackler Family and the opioid epidemic but have yet to start. I am a bit nervous because it is going to make me feel sick. The last non-fiction book I read was Empire of the Summer Moon. It Ends With Us isn’t the last fiction book I read but it was by far the best one recently. Both were fantastic, and I would highly recommend them to anyone.

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

**A:** A cheeseburger straight off the grill in the summer. There is nothing better.

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

**A:** I have really grown to love time at home enjoying simple stuff over the last few years. Reading, baking, gardening, crafting, house projects, movies, cuddling and playing with my dogs. I also love seeing new places and traveling. I love going places with a lot of historical and/or cultural significance like any world heritage site. I want to see them all.

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Interior Design Center Thriving During Trying Times

*Despite Supply-Chain Disruptions and Difficulty in Finding New Quality Employees, Chehalis-Based Company Busier Than Ever*

BY LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Rick Fisher, owner and manager of Interior Design Center in Chehalis and Showcase Kitchens in Adna, is fighting against the now-familiar business problems of supply-chain disruptions and finding quality employees.

Thankfully, he has built up his company for decades and has a waiting list into the next year on taking on any new projects. He said when the pandemic hit the community in March 2020, he was unsure how his business would perform. He said the pandemic had people staying at home, but people continued to spend,

especially on home improvement projects.

“We’re booked up until January 2022,” he said.

He started at the ground floor in 1976 helping build cabinets in a local shop. In 1987 he bought out a cabinet business in Chehalis with three employees. Today his company has 13 employees, manufactures its own cabinets in his Adna shop and both sells and installs complete interior home designs. The business is by far the largest custom design shop in Lewis County. A large part of the business is working directly with homeowners.

“Most of our business comes from word of mouth,” he said. “I’ve done three kitchens over time for the same family.”

While his business continues to thrive in these uncharted times, Fisher said it is difficult to find supplies and products on a timely basis.

“The supply chain is terrible right now. We try not to start things until all the product is in,” he said. “And it is hard to find help. But the good news is I’m busy — I’m busier now than in the past 40 years.”

a longtime former Legislator and leader of efforts to fund capital projects, DeBolt has an insider’s perspective.

DeBolt has hired Todd Chaput to lead an effort that at its essence bundles projects from a wide variety of agencies to work together in a “dig once” priority. Chaput has been hired as the LEDC’s Infrastructure Initiatives Program Manager. Chaput is tasked, with the financial and technological support from the county and the city of Centralia, to produce a date base map that will reveal all the projects in the county from various federal, state, county and city agencies. The map will reveal where agencies have projects that coincide with common locations. The idea is to combine projects such as culvert replacement, broadband fiber optic extensions and other projects



Rick Fisher and his wife Rhonda Raney go over a computer assisted design for a kitchen at their Chehalis business Interior Design Center.

Typically an employee of the business will make a visit to a house under construction, make measurements and then custom design the entire home via a computer-aided design software program.

“We look at each and every cabinet,” Fisher said about offering truly individual custom design. “Everybody is different in what they want in a kitchen. We offer 100% design to fit your lifestyle and needs.”

Fisher is a member of the Lewis Economic Development Council thanks to an assist from the LEDC. Fisher found himself a couple years ago needing a tenant to lease out 5,500-square-feet of extra space at his shop. He heard the LEDC might be able to help. LEDC Internal Relations Manager Eric Sonnenberg found a tenant — Evolve Graphics, which now is open in the space next door to Interior Custom Design.

## CHAIRMAN:

*Continued From Page B1*

Last week LEDC Executive Director Richard DeBolt led a meeting with elected officials and key agency leaders to bring all together in an effort to tap into federal and state funds to increase funding, reduce costs and build in efficiencies for a wide variety of projects across the county.

DeBolt and the LEDC is attempting to corral funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that is targeted toward projects addressing clean water, infrastructure, road projects and broadband expansion. DeBolt is also targeting the Capital Budget in the 2022 state Legislature to place Lewis County projects at the top of the funding list. As

in one effort to dig once. DeBolt understands that the state will prefer projects that are multi-jurisdictional in its funding priorities (see story at left).

In a story about the effort published in The Chronicle, one commentator who has been heavily critical of the LEDC at every turn, has changed his tune.

He wrote, “I was concerned by this new rise of the old Lewis EDC ... maybe some conspiracy by local politicians, business, and The Chronicle owners to create some sort of Lewis County shadow government. But, after watching the meeting, I realized that my conspiracy fears were unfounded

“With all of this infrastructure money coming down from the federal government through ARPA funds, there really is no one government entity capable of coordinating and managing

the projects. The Lewis EDC is putting the tools in place to track and manage all projects in the county from whatever government or private entity and create a coordination umbrella over them. It’s a good thing for Lewis County to get as much of this money as we can and to spend it well on infrastructure and that wouldn’t happen without the Lewis EDC.”

I appreciate those kind words. The LEDC is starting to do some real, concrete work that should bring needed infrastructure funds to our county. Today, I’m proud to be the LEDC chair as our group works for the economic betterment of Lewis County.

•••

*Ben Kostick is chair of the LEDC and owner of Ben M. Kostick CPA Inc.*

# Business Development Center Open for, Well, Business

BY LEWIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Dolly Tardiff, the new manager for the Lewis County Economic Development Council's Business Development Center, unveiled her program at a recent meeting.

"We are opening the Business Development Center," Tardiff said. "It is a one-stop for people to open and grow their business, from securing proper licenses, choosing a proper name and the right type of business structure set-up."

She said 90% of new businesses fail due to a lack of proper business knowledge, with 20% going under in the first year. She can help turn that trend around. Tardiff's duties are wide ranging, she said, sort of a Business Opening 101 program. She can help businesses with obtaining proper licenses, filling out tax identification papers, assistance with L&I requirements, link up with banks and credit unions, help with marketing and social media, choose a proper location and even prepare for emergencies, to name a few of her duties.

"Implementing the BDC will help people starting a new business," she said. "I will help give business owners the fundamentals in helping them with their startup."

Tardiff said she can help with fund-



Lewis Economic Development Council Business Development Center Program Manager Dolly Tardiff, right, describes some of the business support possibilities the LEDC offers at a recent meeting. The Chehalis Community Renaissance Team Executive Director Annalee Tobey listens at left.

ing, expansions or relocations, mergers and acquisitions, becoming a federal contractor and exporting products.

"Our goal is to provide all businesses in Lewis County all the assistance they

require," Tardiff said.

Tardiff will provide a speaker each month at the LEDC's membership meetings (see sidebar for the upcoming meeting on cyber security).

## CYBER SECURITY EXPERT IS NEXT LEDC SPEAKER

JT Mundi is the next speaker at the noon, Wednesday, Aug. 18 Lewis Economic Development Council membership meeting held at Riverside Golf Course.

Cyberattacks are being launched in the largest volume, and with more sophistication, than ever before. The increased competition amongst attackers means that more organizations are being targeted, with small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) no longer able to remain under the radar. In fact, the lack of resources and relatively weak defenses make SMBs an attractive target to a wide variety of threats.

But what does a typical attack look like? And what security solutions should be in place to give the best possible defense?

Join the LEDC for an informative talk to learn about common techniques to deliver ransomware, look at why attacks are succeeding and recommendations to help you stay secure.

...

Dolly Tardiff can be reached at [dolly@lewisledc.com](mailto:dolly@lewisledc.com).

## PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT — FOR LEASE



For information on this property and others available throughout Lewis County (or to list your industrial/commercial property for sale), contact Lewis Economic Development Council External Relations Manager Eric Sonnenberg at 208.206.5407 or [eric@lewisledc.com](mailto:eric@lewisledc.com), or go to [lewisledc.com](http://lewisledc.com).

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